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**Dorise Nielsen, The Life and Ideas of a
Canadian Woman in Politics**

Faith Johnston, B.A., B.Educ.

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Canadian Studies**

Carleton University

OTTAWA, Ontario

August 21, 1989

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ISBN 0-315-54438-4

Canada

The undersigned recommend to the Faculty
of Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of the thesis
"Dorise Nielsen, The Life and Ideas of
a Canadian Woman in Politics"
submitted by Faith Johnston, B.A., B.Ed.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

Dorise Nielsen (1902-1980) was the third woman to be elected to Parliament in Canada (1940-45). She was also the first communist member of Parliament, and, until recently, the only woman to be elected while raising young children.

This paper examines Nielsen's life and ideas from the beginning of her political career in Saskatchewan in the 1930's, until she left political work in 1954. It assesses the relative importance of ideological, environmental, and personal factors that caused her to undertake political work, and that sustained her through a difficult and, on the whole, unrewarding political career, and attempts to evaluate the effects of Nielsen's political commitment on her personal life and on the lives of her children. It concludes that Nielsen's strong commitment to communism resulted from her own experience of poverty and isolation, and that communist ideology validated her own need for an independent life, and was the basis of her analysis of the oppression of women and her proposals for women's equality. Finally, it proposes that Nielsen's problems in trying to be both a good mother and a good revolutionary were inevitable because in practice there was little support for women's equality in the Communist Party of Canada, and because the position of the CPC in Canada declined after 1945.

Acknowledgements

In preparing this paper, I am grateful for the help of my supervisor, Marilyn Barber, and my friend, Georgina Taylor, and particularly for the generosity of Christine Nielsen and Sally Nielsen Carter in sharing their memories of their mother.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Dorise Nielsen was one of many women and men who became politically active as a result of their experiences during the depression of the 1930's. She is known to have been active in the Saskatchewan CCF in the late thirties and in 1938 to have participated in establishing a constituency group called the United Progressive Movement, consisting of Social Credit, CCF and Communist party supporters, all anxious to work together to defeat the Liberals and elect their own member of parliament. Her efforts resulted in her expulsion from the CCF, but also her election to parliament in 1940, as the United Progressive member for North Battleford.

In parliament Nielsen was an energetic and eloquent spokesperson for the west, and for women and other disadvantaged groups, but more particularly, her unexpected electoral success cast her in the role of a major public figure speaking for the Communist Party of Canada. When she was defeated in 1945, she moved to Toronto to work full-time for the party, then called the Labour Progressive Party, until 1954. During this time, her role in the party declined even more rapidly than the party's popularity with the Canadian public. Yet she continued to be a loyal party worker, willing to undertake tasks that often conflicted with her responsibility for three children.

Dorise Nielsen, more than most women of her time, rejected the ideology of domesticity, not only by undertaking full-time work in the public sphere, but by doing so when her children were young. The chief questions to be asked, I believe, are what factors led her to choose her particular form of activism, what sustained her through those years of political activism that began in the thirties and ended in the fifties, and ultimately what effect her political allegiance and her activities in politics had on her life as a whole. Also, I hope to form some tentative conclusions from Nielsen's experience, about the attractions of left-wing political movements for women, the dilemmas, and obstacles for women who undertake demanding outside work while raising children, and the particular characteristics of Marxist ideology that nurture improvements in the status of women and those characteristics that limit it.

Understanding the politicization of Dorise Nielsen requires an understanding of the populist revolt that occurred in Saskatchewan in the 1930's, and particularly the place of women, and communists in that revolt. It also requires an understanding of Nielsen's background and her aspirations. Why did Nielsen join the Communist Party rather than the CCF or the Social Credit? Why did she become a federal candidate instead of choosing local party work that might have enabled her to combine political

action and family responsibilities more easily? Her choices, which left her open to criticism as well as personal sacrifice, seem to indicate that she was a woman with strong convictions and sufficient self-confidence to live by them. I would like to investigate her convictions, and the sources of her self-confidence, as well as the particular political environment that at first enabled her participation, and later limited it.

Two general studies of women in politics in Canada have limited value in studying Nielsen, because they have focused largely on the impediments to female political participation rather than studying particular women who have gained prominence in politics to analyze the factors that have led to their participation. Also, in the case of Toeing the Lines: Women and Party Politics in English Canada, Sylvia Bashevkin has chosen to study only the major political parties, leaving out the Communist Party, and in the case of Canadian Women in Politics: An Overview, Brodie and Vickers have focused on the period after 1950. The conclusion of these works, that political parties have inhibited women's full political participation by encouraging a male-female division of labour in political work, and that partisanship has prevented the emergence of a strong women's lobby, were certainly true of the Communist Party as well, but these problems have been more fully dealt with in Joan Sangster's study of the CPC and

the CCF, Dreams of Equality.

Both Toeing the Lines: Women and Party Politics in English Canada and Canadian Women in Politics: An Overview, by generalizing over a longer period of time, give a slightly distorted picture of the five women elected to the House of Commons 1921-1950. Bashevkin notes that since the tenure of Agnes Macphail, there have been at least seven female members who inherited federal seats from their husbands,¹ while Brodie and Vickers, in summarizing the common characteristics of women elected to the House of Commons before 1960, point to the number of homemakers, teachers and widows of previous members.² If one looks only at the women elected before 1950, two, one Liberal and the other a Conservative, were widows of previous members, while three, Agnes Macphail (1921-1940), Dorise Nielsen (1940-1945), and Gladys Strum (1945-1950), all representing left-wing parties, got there very much on their own steam. All three were teachers or former teachers, who represented farm areas. I see both Dorise Nielsen and Gladys Strum, a Saskatchewan CCF member of parliament, as similar in many ways to Agnes Macphail, although they were married and she was single. Apart from not being elected on their husbands' coattails, and from having backgrounds in teaching and rural life, all three women, as socialists, and, in the context of their times, as feminists used their positions as members of parliament to fight for the

under-privileged, including women.

A fuller account of women's activities in the public sphere, including all the political parties, during the interwar years is Veronica Strong-Boag's general history of women in English Canada (1919-1939), The New Day Recalled. It points out the particular visibility of western women as candidates during the period, and concludes that there is "no reason to believe there was an absolute decline in female activism after the suffrage campaign",³ but that women's energies were for the most part channeled into support for groups that put ethnic or class interests before gender issues. She aptly uses Dorise Nielsen as an example of a woman who put class interests first. In fact, Nielsen's political experience substantiates most of Strong-Boag's generalizations about women's activities in the public sphere, except her observations, that most female electoral candidates were "club women" over forty, relatively free of family responsibilities, and that the majority of their activities centered on the local community. Like most others, Nielsen owed her prominence to her own "industry and ability", not family connections, and like others, class interests, in Nielsen's case, the interests of the farm community, and reforms affecting women particularly, such as maternal and child health, were priorities.⁴

Certain themes emerge from the literature on socialist

women that are pertinent to understanding Nielsen. Barbara Taylor's study of the Owenites, Eve and the New Jerusalem, looks at the roles of women and the place of feminist issues in the different phases of this early socialist movement. She found that Owenism attracted many women and some gained prominence as proselytizers, particularly in the early stages of the movement. Some women were attracted by the movement's ideology of female equality, but for many the vision of liberty and bread for all oppressed people was paramount. In addition, the movement offered some women a more equitable lifestyle than they could manage outside the organization. Educated, dedicated people, whether male or female, were needed to organize, lecture and write in support of the movement. Women, as well as men, could aspire to play important, even heroic roles in bringing about the new world. At the same time, most of the women in Owenite organizations played traditional support roles, and their main connection with the movement was through a male relative, usually their husband. This meant that the more prominent women received little support from their sisters and were unable to make the feminist aims of Owenism a priority. Also, as Owenism became established, and as it declined from a movement to a sect, women were unable to retain their initial prominence partly because there was no strong female network to support them.

Although the Owenites existed over a hundred years ago,

Taylor has described a familiar pattern, common to socialist parties in this century. Of course, it is impossible for any group, no matter how idealistic its members, not to reflect to some degree the society around it. That said, it is relevant to understand the various reasons that women have been attracted to socialism and to examine the dynamics of institutional development that allows women more prominent roles at some times rather than others. In the 1930's in Saskatchewan, most women were attracted to socialist movements because they offered a solution to severe economic hardships, not because they paid lip-service to female equality, and most women in these movements were content to play traditional female support roles. Yet for some women, those whose education and talents were under-utilized and who wanted to achieve something of importance in the public sphere, socialist movements, whether CCF or communist, were an opportunity to use their talents for a good cause. Nielsen, like some of the women prominent in early Owenism, was a woman whose talents had been under-utilized. She was useful to the Communist Party at a time when it was expanding and needed to make full use of all its human resources.

Joan Sangster's book on women in the Canadian Communist Party and the CCF (1920-1950), Dreams of Equality, and the doctoral dissertation on which it is based, provides an overview of the place of women's issues in the CPC

priorities, and of the roles of individual women and women's groups in the party. She has shown that throughout the period, the party enabled some courageous, dedicated women, usually young women who did not have families, to live out their equality as propagandists and union organizers. Most party women, however, were housewives who played auxiliary roles. After the 1920's, women's issues and women's groups in the party were strictly subordinated in the interests of working class unity. In regard to women, the party's chief concern was how to educate them and mobilize them in support of successive party campaigns, not how to liberate them from their subordinate status in the family, in the party, and in the society at large. Altogether, Sangster concludes the CPC had a much stronger "antipathy to feminism" than the CCF.⁵

What Sangster's work fails to do, largely because of the scope, is to give much specific information on the work of party women in Saskatchewan in the 1930's. She also gives little explanation of factors, apart from ethnicity, that distinguish women in the CCF from women in the CCP, yet in the 1930's and 1940's many non-ethnic women joined the CCP as well as the CCF. In addition she either has not explored, or has chosen to gloss over the roles played by covert communists like Dorise Nielsen. Why did some women choose not to reveal their membership - was this a party choice or an individual choice? What factors distinguished

these women from others in the party? Another interesting question, and one relevant to Nielsen, is the type of relationships that existed between anglo and ethnic women in the party. Did these relationships mirror the pecking order in the larger society, or because of the large number of ethnic members, was the pecking order reversed, or, were relationships in the party more egalitarian?

In providing a picture of women's politicization in Saskatchewan in the 1930's, and the roles of women in the farm movement and the CCF, the work of Georgina Taylor has been particularly helpful. In an article, "Shall I Drown Myself Now or Later?",⁶ she proposes that an important reason for women's participation in all these groups was a need to overcome their isolation and loneliness. In addition, particularly in the settlement period, which in Northern Saskatchewan extended into the 1920's, local people had to band together to set up or lobby for schools, churches and hospitals. Taylor's master's thesis, "Equals and Partners",⁷ examines the way twelve women who were active in the CCF from 1932 to 1967 reconciled their political work with their family responsibilities. She found that most women, Dorise Nielsen being a notable exception, geared their political work to their responsibilities at home, rather than vice versa. Still, despite this limitation, and despite sexual discrimination within the party, women did a wide range of party work, not

all of it traditional support work. The women she studied may have had some difficulty juggling the roles of mother and political worker on a practical level, but, ideologically there was little conflict because they saw their political work as an extension of their reproductive work - they were working to make the world better for their own families and all families.

Taylor's thesis is valuable in that it portrays the milieu in which Nielsen worked in the 1930's. Her speculations about Nielsen - that she was a more radical feminist than the other women, that her mentors may have been Violet McNaughton and M.J. Coldwell, and that she was a CCF woman who, for some reason, at some point, left the party to become a communist - have not been born out by sources that have become available more recently.

Elizabeth Smillie's thesis on Dorise Nielsen⁸ suffered a similar handicap. Both women had to rely on published sources such as newspapers and periodicals, the Violet McNaughton Papers, and oral histories; they did not have access to the Nielsen papers, nor did they have the opportunity for extensive interviews with the Nielsen children before they wrote. Also neither woman was interested in studying Nielsen's life after 1945. Smillie has focused on explaining the circumstances that led to her election in 1940, and on investigating the issues she raised in the House of Commons 1940-1945. I am indebted to

both women for the interviews they conducted in Saskatchewan, and for bringing my attention to the McNaughton Papers.

Two biographies of communist women, both written from a feminist perspective, provide some valuable insights about the possible reasons women become committed to a radical political movement, and the possible effects of persecution on a person's self-concept. Beatrice Farnsworth's Aleksandra Kollontai (1980) proposes that Kollontai initially embraced socialism not so much from political or economic belief as from personal need to achieve. Ilene Philipson, in Ethel Rosenberg, Beyond the Myths (1988) describes Rosenberg's stoicism while in prison as being based on her belief that she was playing an heroic role. In letters to her husband, she compared herself to Saint Joan.

The ideas of Marxism about the causes of women's oppression and the Marxist strategy for women's emancipation, based on Engels' The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, are summarized and assessed by Alena Heitlinger in "Marxism, Feminism, and Sexual Equality". Since Engels' book remains the most important Marxist work on this topic, and was used by the Canadian Communist Party, and valued by Nielsen, Heitlinger's insights have been helpful in my work. Engels' prescription for women's emancipation had three requirements: the abolition of private property, for he

believed it was the acquisition of private property that had resulted in the patriarchy; the employment of women outside their homes, so that they would be economically independent of their husbands; and the socialization of private domestic work and childcare. Heitlinger points out the problems with the Marxist prescription for emancipation based on her studies of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and the insights of radical feminists. First of all, it has been found that there are limits to the extent that domestic labour can be socialized, and the material costs of such socialization are very high. Secondly she believes that most socialist feminists have under-estimated the importance of personal self-transformation, or consciousness-raising, and have over-estimated the ability of the state to implement sexual equality through institutional change. Structural economic changes are a necessary ingredient for the liberation of women, but changes in individual relationships and consciousness seem to be a more important part of the process than Marxists have assumed. Moreover, all hierarchies, whether the church, the state, or the communist party, become oppressive themselves because power is not shared. Thus, increasing the power of the state in order to bring about equality can be counter-productive.⁹

Of course, we are still trying to work out the emancipation of women in our society. Marxism has

correctly emphasized the need for women's economic independence, and a change in women's traditional domestic duties, as vital to the process. Most modern feminists would agree with Heitlinger that consciousness-raising and then power-sharing are other vital elements of the liberation process, and would point out that such processes must be taken up by women themselves. It is unlikely that such processes could be nurtured in a male-dominated political party, that required working class unity and viewed feminism as a bourgeoisie phenomena. On the other hand, in the 1930's and 1940's, on the ideological level, Marxists were presenting a more coherent analysis of the causes and cures of women's oppression than any other political group, and one can understand the attraction of communist parties for anyone like Nielsen who was concerned about the status of women.

Of the secondary sources on the Communist Party of Canada, apart from Joan Sangster's work, I have found the work of Norman Penner, David Monod, Peter Sinclair and Ivan Avakumovic most useful in providing information. In Canadian Communism, The Stalin Years and Beyond (1988), Penner explains the inner workings of the party from his own experience as a member of the national executive in the 1950's, and from interviews with high-ranking party members, as well as from archival sources. Although his main purpose has been to trace the links between the

Canadian party and Moscow, he has also given attention to documenting the activities of rank and file members, and has been able to give a fairly dispassionate and detailed assessment of the party's policies and work on the Canadian scene which is much more helpful than either the party's official history, Canada's Party of Socialism (1982) or Ivan Avakumovic's, The Communist Party in Canada (1975).

The most valuable sources of information on the CPC's work among farmers in Saskatchewan during the 1920's and the 1930's are Ivan Avakumovic's article, "The Communist Party of Canada and the Prairie Farmer: The Interwar Years,"¹⁰ and the more extensive work of David Monod.¹¹ Both have described the work of the Farmer's Unity League (1930-1935), a communist organization that enjoyed brief success in Alberta and Saskatchewan. The organization aimed to provide leadership on practical issues such as the provision of relief and the prevention of evictions, and was notable for its militancy, not its revolutionary rhetoric. It was the activities of the FUL in her area that may have attracted Nielsen to the CPC.

Peter Sinclair¹² has studied Dorise Nielsen's constituency as an example of the CCF's pragmatic approach to co-operation with other parties. He has shown that until 1938 the provincial CCF vacillated on whether or not to co-operate with other progressive groups. In the case of North Battleford, where the CCF constituency

organization was weak, the provincial CCF at first allowed known communists to be on the executive, only objecting in 1938 when Wass Turple, a known communist who refused to renounce his affiliation with the CPC, was nominated CCF candidate in the provincial election. In 1938, the provincial executive also took a tough stand when local CCF'ers formed a unity group with communists and Social Crediters to nominate a federal candidate: the local CCF executive was dismissed, and Nielsen, a member of that executive, was expelled from the CCF Provincial Council, yet at the last moment, unable to field its own candidate, the CCF was willing to give its unofficial support to Nielsen.

Finally, the most important resources in preparing this paper have been the primary sources. A major problem has been Nielsen's reluctance to talk or write in any detail about her political career in Canada, although several people urged her to do so. Also, the papers of the Communist Party of Canada tell very little. Still, a number of sources reveal Nielsen's thoughts at various stages in her life. The earliest sources are the letters she wrote to the women's page editor of the Western Producer, Violet McNaughton (1937-39) under a pseudonym "Judy", and her private correspondence with McNaughton (1937-1943). When she was elected to parliament in 1940, as the only woman member, a number of articles were written about her in

current newspapers and periodicals, and some were based on interviews with her. During her term in parliament 1940-45, she spoke frequently and at length in the House of Commons Debates. She also corresponded with a close friend, Heidi Vockeroth, and a small part of that correspondence has survived. In the same period, she was the author of several booklets published by the communist press. Most of them were simply collections of her speeches in the House of Commons, but one of them, New Worlds for Women, written in 1944, was an original work about women's roles and needs in the post-war world.

After she lost her seat in 1945, Nielsen moved to Toronto and worked for the Labor Progressive Party in various capacities until 1954. From 1947 until 1951 she wrote regularly for The Canadian Tribune; part of that time (September 1948 until March 1951) she was responsible for a column entitled, "Women's Place is Everywhere".

After her departure from Canada in 1956 to England, and then in 1957, her final move to Peking, she wrote letters to friends and family, some of which have survived. The most valuable and voluminous correspondence was with Louise Harvey, a woman whom Nielsen met through the party in 1940. It seems that Nielsen served as a mentor to Harvey. Her letters are full of solicitous advice about Harvey's love life, her children, and her politics, sprinkled with descriptions of Nielsen's own experiences that may be

helpful.

Also, while in China, Nielsen typed two outlines of her life in 1968, and a third in 1975. All were found among her papers when she died. Judging from their contents, Nielsen was anxious to remember and justify her own behaviour, particularly since coming to China. Still they give a sketchy outline of her political work in Canada, and her later reflections on that work. Very different, in every respect, is a four-hundred page memoir that Nielsen wrote for her children and gave them in 1974 on her first visit back to Canada. It is an unhurried account, written with obvious enjoyment, of her family's history and her own life to 1928, the first year of her marriage.

Another method of understanding Nielsen's personality, her thoughts, and her environment, has been conversations with those who knew her. Minerva Miller met Nielsen while both were involved with the CCF and the CPC in Saskatchewan in the late 1930's. Bill and Mary Kardash met Nielsen in the early 1940's. Mary took care of Nielsen's children for a while and both Bill and Mary took part in political meetings and public events with her. Virginia MacLeod and Kathleen Repka knew her while she lived in Toronto 1945-1955. Nielsen's daughters, Sally Nielsen Carter and Christine Nielsen have very vivid recollections of their mother from the late 1930's until her death in 1980. Norman Penner and Frank Park did not know Nielsen well, but

they have been able to provide me with valuable insights into the CPC in the 1940's and 1950's.

Many of these sources, particularly those written by Nielsen herself, present some problems. Until 1943 when the Labor Progressive Party was formed, Nielsen kept her communist affiliation secret, and presumably the need for secrecy affected some of her public pronouncements, and possibly even her personal correspondence. Similarly her letters from China may have been written cautiously in case they were opened by the Chinese authorities. Through all of these sources, however, there is an undisguised and coherent integrity of belief. She may have hesitated to reveal everything, but what she said, she meant. My impression from her writings, has been confirmed by interviews with those who knew her. Nielsen was not a hypocrite.

A far more difficult problem presented by the primary sources is Nielsen's own personality. If she had close friends to whom she revealed her own dilemmas and anguish, they were probably rare. She believed in "the stiff upper lip", and she saw herself as a mentor, a teacher. Her letters are always mindful of giving the reader encouragement, and are frequently didactic. Intellectually, she believed in brotherhood and sisterhood, but she practised a lonely heroism most of the time. This often involved hiding her true feelings, particularly if

they detracted from "the cause". To some extent, the wealth and variety of primary sources helps compensate for this problem. At the same time, what at first appeared to me as a problem, now seems to be the key to understanding Nielsen. Her Marxist beliefs and her concept of her own role in bringing about the new millenium, dominated both her personal and her public life. Without these beliefs, she could not have continued in the path she had chosen.

It is important, then, to examine Nielsen's philosophy, and to try to understand how it developed and how it affected her personal and public life, particularly from the 1930's until 1955 when she lived in Canada and was politically active here. That is the purpose of this paper.

Footnotes

1. Sylvia Bachevkin, Toeing the Lines (1985), p. 75.
2. M. Janice Brodie and Jill McCalla Vickers, Canadian Women in Politics: An Overview, CRIAW Papers, No. 2, Sept. 1982.
3. Veronica Strong-Boag, The New Day Recalled (1988), p. 195.
4. Ibid., pp. 203-204.
5. Joan Sangster, Dreams of Equality, p. 88.
6. "Shall I Drown Myself Now or Later?". The Isolation of Rural Women in Saskatchewan and Their Participation in the Homemakers' Clubs, the Farm Movement and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation 1910-1967, Women: Isolation and Bonding - The Ecology of Gender (1987), pp. 79-100.
7. Georgina Taylor, "Equals and Partners", an examination of the roles of twelve women active in the CCF 1932-1967, M.A. Thesis, 1983, the University of Saskatchewan.
8. Elizabeth Smillie, "Dorise Nielsen, Prairie Populist and Feminist", Honors Thesis in Canadian Studies, Trent University, 1981.
9. Alena Heitlinger, "Marxism, Feminism and Sexual Equality", Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, edited by Tova Yedlin, Praeger, 1978.
10. From Western Perspectives, papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, 1973, edited by D.J. Bercuson (1974).
11. David Monod, "The Agrarian Struggle, Rural Communism in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1926-1935", Histoire Sociale - Social History, May 1985, and "Soldiers of the Plough: Popular Protest and Insurgency in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1918-1948", M.A. Thesis, McGill, 1983.
12. Peter Sinclair, "The Saskatchewan CCF and the Communist Party in the 1930's", Saskatchewan History, Winter, 1973.

CHAPTER TWO

THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

When Doris Webber arrived in Canada in January, 1927, to take up a teaching post in northern Saskatchewan she was apolitical and "thought of nothing but having a good time".¹ In terms of having a good time, unfortunately she had come to the wrong place, at the wrong time, but if she had been seeking an education in grassroots politics, she had come to the right place, and her timing was excellent.

Saskatchewan and Alberta had been breeding grounds for social protest movements from the time of their settlement in the late nineteenth century. Farmers had banded together in successive and occasionally competing organizations to protest their exploitation at the hands of bankers, grainbuyers, and governments. By 1927 they had set up co-ops to market their grain, had founded newspapers and had run progressive candidates in federal and provincial elections.

When Nielsen arrived in Saskatchewan, the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) dominated the farmers' protest scene there. In the wake of the depression, the U.F.C. formed a political wing called the Farmer-Labour group, which merged into the new Cooperative Commonwealth Federation after its formation in 1933. The CCF was an alliance of socialist, labour and farm groups

in which there was a broad range of ideology, particularly in the 1930's. It included non-communist Marxists from the labour movement who advocated state ownership of all capital, as well as intellectuals from the League for Social Reconstruction whose approach to changing the capitalist system was more moderate and reformist in supporting a comprehensive social security system.

All groups participating in the CCF were critical of the capitalist system and wanted more fundamental reform than the monetary reform advocated by Social Credit, but in the early years there were differences of opinion on the extent of socialization desirable, and on the degree to which the CCF should co-operate with other parties such as Social Credit and the CPC at election time. The CCF's initial statement of principles, the Regina Manifesto, called for the eradication of all capitalist property, but because the idea of the socialization of land did not sit well with farmers, it was soon discarded from the party platform.² Peter Sinclair has argued that the policy of the CCF in Saskatchewan with regard to co-operation with other groups was essentially pragmatic. At first it opposed co-operation, but then, when the party did poorly in the federal election of 1935, partly because of vote splitting among the reform parties, the provincial convention voted for co-operation with other progressive forces, including the CPC and Social Credit, as long as

groups retained their separate identity. In practice, this meant that constituency groups could, with official approval, refrain from nominating a CCF candidate, and give their support to a Social Credit candidate. This policy was dropped after the 1938 provincial election in which Social Credit did poorly in most constituencies. From 1938, the Saskatchewan CCF officially rejected any form of co-operation with other reform parties.³

Another part of the prairie protest scene, though a much smaller group than the CCF, was the Communist Party of Canada, and several mass organizations that it sponsored. So far, the most comprehensive picture of CPC activity on the prairies in the inter-war years has been done by Ivan Avakumovic.⁴ David Monod, in his effort to link various farm protest movements to socio-economic factors, has also studied the most successful communist-led protest group on the prairies, the Farmers Unity League (1930-1935) and has investigated the roots of communism on the prairies. He believes that Avakumovic has under-estimated the extent of CPC support on the prairies, and that both Avakumovic and Penner have erred in depicting the prairie communists as completely controlled by headquarters in Toronto, which in turn was directed by Moscow through Comintern. He goes on to show that prairie communists were active in the Farmers Union of Canada before 1925 when the CCF, founded in 1921, moved in to assist and direct them, and that even after

1925 the local communist leadership sometimes modified the party line on farm matters to be more compatible with the reality of western Canada. This question of the degree of local initiative within the CCP is an interesting one. Morod's own evidence suggests that local leaders who openly questioned the party-line were removed, but that central control was not absolute.

Neither Monod nor Avakumovic have investigated the CPC on the prairies after 1935 when it disbanded its agrarian wing, the Farmers Unity League, in favour of promoting a united front with other left-wing groups. Although the FUL is seen by both scholars to be the CPC's "most conspicuous attempt to convert the Western farmers to revolutionary socialism",⁵ it was during the later "popular front" period (1935-1939) that the CPC experienced its greatest growth. While it is true that throughout its history most CPC supporters lived in cities and in mining areas, and that in the 1930's, farmers composed only about fifteen percent of CPC membership,⁶ it probably is also true that the influx of members and sympathizers from non-ethnic communities that occurred in the late 1930's happened on the prairies as well. Unfortunately, party activities on the prairies in this period have not been studied. It has been assumed that the growth of Social Credit and the CCF resulted in the decline of the CPC among farmers yet there is evidence that for a short period in

the late thirties all three groups experienced growth in some areas of Saskatchewan.

Looking at the whole decade of the 1930's, the period when Dorise Nielsen became politically active in the CPC, the important factors in understanding her politicization are to understand the aims and activities of the CPC as distinct from other groups.

According to Avakumovic, the CPC became interested in organizing prairie farmers in the 1920's for two reasons: Lenin's belief, as promoted by Comintern, that poor farmers would join with the working class to overthrow capitalism; and the existence in western Canada, in the early twenties, of fertile ground for communist agitation on account of both farmer discontent, and the presence of radical socialists on the prairies even before the existence of the CPC. The aim of the CPC throughout the twenties and the thirties, was to win farmers to the cause of revolutionary socialism. It directed its propaganda particularly to the poorest farmers (the "dirt" farmers) and to landless farm laborers. Its program of promoting dissention between large farmers (the "kulaks") and small farmers, and its belief in land collectivization, had little appeal for most farm people who valued their position as property owners, and who continued to see themselves as a class in opposition to eastern industrial and finance capitalists. That its underlying program and aims did have some validity

for "dirt farmers" is pointed out by Monod: it was the small "dirt" farmer who was being squeezed off the farm by the mechanization of agriculture and consequent long-term decline in farm prices and farm population, and ultimately it was the large farmer who benefited from the process. In the short-term, however, it was the banks who were the most obvious cause of the many foreclosures that occurred when agricultural prices declined.

Although its basic solutions to farm problems were the overthrow of capitalism through revolution, and then land collectivization, in the 1930's the CPC also supported reformist solutions to social and economic problems. The Farmers Unity League (1930-1935) demanded a minimum of income of \$1,000 to be paid by the state, free medical care, non-contributory social insurance and old age pensions, and a moratorium on farm debt.⁷ During the popular front period (1935-1939), the CPC platform differed little from that of the CCF: both advocated a comprehensive social security system for Canada and a planned economy with major industries being owned by the government. Both endorsed co-operative efforts in agriculture, and neither group advocated state-ownership of farms.⁸

In the 1930's the distinction between the two parties was not in their programs but in other areas. Most obviously, the CCF was a democratic socialist party, while

the CPC believed that socialism would ultimately come through revolution. The CPC was therefore interested in stirring up class conflict, whereas the CCF, with its strong base in the social gospel movement, took a reformist approach that attempted to minimize class conflict. Although the CPC did fight elections, it often showed greater militancy than CCF. The Farmers Unity League was particularly active in organizing anti-foreclosure activities such as penny auctions. It gathered thousands of signatures for a Farm Relief Petition presented to the Bennett government in 1932, and participated in two farmers strikes in Alberta in 1932 and 1934.⁹ Some of these activities took place, of course, before the formation of either the CCF or the Social Credit parties. Another important difference was the CPC's faith in the Soviet Union as a model socialist society. Most socialists were interested in the Soviet experiment, but for communists, the USSR was particularly important as an example of the possibilities of what could be achieved after the revolution.

Distinctions between the two parties can also be made on the basis of membership and support. The CPC's strongest support came from Ukrainian, Finnish and Doukhobor farmers. In communities that were mainly Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian or German, the extent of party activity and support usually depended on a tiny nucleus of party members

and sympathizers.¹⁰ David Monod believes that there was an economic link, and that the FUL was particularly active in the park belt of Alberta and Saskatchewan, north of the plains, because this area had been newly opened to farming and contained many small uneconomic farms. It is difficult to know whether the link is primarily ethnic or primarily economic, however, because the park belt was also an area of ethnic concentration. The CCF, on the other hand, failed to appeal to the poorest farmers and garnered its major support from Anglo-Saxon farmers in southern Saskatchewan.¹¹

The CPC operated as an outlawed organization from 1931-1936. During this period both its rural and urban clubs or cells continued to meet secretly, and the organizations associated with the CPC, including the Farmers Unity League and the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association, operated openly. Some communists joined the CCF. In 1937, the election of a known communist, Wass Turple, to the CCF constituency executive in Meadow Lake was accepted by the provincial CCF leader, George Williams. Subsequently, Turple was nominated CCF candidate for Meadow Lake in the 1938 provincial election, but the provincial organization forced him to step down, and set a new policy: no CCF candidate could be a member of another political party.¹² The infiltration of communists into the CCF obviously occurred in Saskatchewan, as it did in

other provinces, but, according to Sinclair the difficulties such infiltration presented there were minimal compared to Ontario and British Columbia.¹³ Although the success of Saskatchewan communists may have been short-lived, it certainly was spectacular: local communists were largely responsible for the election of two members of parliament in 1940, Dorise Nielsen and Rev. W.G. Brown.¹⁴

An important change occurred in CPC policy in 1935 that affected the party's growth, its ideology and its relations with non-communists at the grass-roots level. Before 1935, following the Comintern line, the CPC had denounced social democrats, its chief rivals for working class support, as reactionaries and social fascists. In Canada, labour groups, the progressives of the 1920's, and the new CCF had been subject to such treatment by the CPC, even though, at the same time, another aspect of communist policy had been to attempt to take over such groups by infiltration. In 1935, because of the fascist threat to communist parties in Europe and to the Soviet Union, Comintern advocated that communist parties form a united front with social democrats and liberals. Revolutionary goals were to be put on the back burner; communists were to use all their efforts "to defend the liberal democratic states against fascism".¹⁵ Thus began the "popular front" period in communist history. It lasted until the signing of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact in August, 1939.

In Canada, the overtures of the CPC for a coalition were firmly rejected by the national CCF whose leaders not only had experienced previous vilification from communists, and believed that the CPC was Moscow-controlled, but also knew that any association with the CPC would ultimately handicap the CCF at the polls. While the CCF leadership was anxious not to associate with "the reds", some members had no such qualms. They reasoned that since the platforms of both groups for social reform were similar, and since both groups were in a minority, it made sense to pool their efforts on an ad hoc basis. As I have noted previously, the policy of ad hoc co-operation even had brief approval from the provincial CCF organization in Saskatchewan, where the leader, George Williams, probably reflected a fairly widely held view when he said that:

.....a good number of people who call themselves Communists are really only people who are disgusted with the slowness of democratic action and are as eager as anyone to co-operate to get things done.¹⁶

This tendency of some CCF supporters to see communists as their natural allies in the period was attributable not only to the emphasis on reform, not revolution in CPC policies and rhetoric, but also to the work of communists in such united front groups as the League Against War and Fascism and the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy. Both groups were active on the prairies, and probably attracted some recruits to communism there, as they did in other places. In the summer of 1938, during a tour of Canada,

Norman Bethune attracted large audiences, including both communists and non-communists. He chose a meeting in Prince Albert to declare his allegiance to the CPC.¹⁷

Given the pragmatic and activist approach to change of the Farmers Unity League in the early 1930's, and the CPC's later policy of co-operation with other groups to achieve badly needed social and economic reforms, it is not surprising that communists sometimes appeared to be simply socialists in a hurry - similar to the CCF but more militant and dedicated. For Nielsen this appeal may have been particularly strong because she lived in the park belt of northern Saskatchewan, an area of desperate poverty, and an area of communist activism. Nielsen probably knew about FUL anti-foreclosure activities and its relief petition, and she may have participated in them. In his memoirs, Walter Wiggins, the leader of the FUL in Saskatchewan, mentions holding a meeting in Nielsen's village, Spiritwood. The meeting was chaired by Bob Bowie, the "old German" who Nielsen said first introduced her to Marxism in the early thirties.¹⁸ In an outline of her life written many years later, Nielsen says that she joined the CPC in the early thirties and that she participated in the struggle for relief.¹⁹

Evidently the park belt continued to be an area of communist activity even after the FUL was abandoned. Sandy Nicholson, the only CCF organizer in northeastern

Saskatchewan before 1940, and later a member of Parliament, recalled that there were four full-time communist organizers in his area, and that "the money wasn't coming from Russia, it was coming from the people of McKenzie who believed that change was important".²⁰

The Meadow Lake area, where Nielsen lived, was another pocket of communist strength. Before 1937, the CCF constituency organization there was weak, and it appears to have picked up only when local communists decided to take control. In 1937, Bob Paul, a covert communist, was elected secretary "and began to build an efficient organization".²¹ He reported to the provincial CCF that the CPC was active in the area, had a lot of support, and was pressing for the unity of CCF, Social Credit and the CPC at election time. As I have mentioned before, the provincial CCF clearly rejected such cooperation in 1938, but the Meadow Lake CCF organization persisted in its efforts for unity, and participated in founding the United Reform Movement in 1938, which in 1940 succeeded in electing Dorise Nielsen member of parliament for the federal constituency of North Battleford.

At the federal level in 1940 unity candidates were successful in only two constituencies, Saskatoon and North Battleford. Communists, implementing Comintern's united front strategy, played an important role in both contests,²² and for several reasons, circumstances played

into their hands. First of all, there were the well-hated Liberals. In Saskatchewan, the Liberal machine was well-entrenched and notoriously corrupt.²³ The Liberals had been in power provincially from the time Saskatchewan gained provincial status in 1905 until 1929 when a coalition of Conservatives, Progressives and Independents had defeated them, but they had been returned to power again in 1934. In the 1938 provincial elections the high hopes of both the CCF and the Social Credit Party had been disappointed. The Liberals had won again.²⁴ This time, however, two "unity" candidates had been successful. They had joined forces with two Social Credit members to form a United Reform Group in the Saskatchewan legislature.²⁵

It was at this point that several local groups decided to run only one "unity" or "progressive" candidate in the next federal election.²⁶ As I have said, in both Saskatoon and North Battleford, there is little doubt that Communists were instrumental in promoting the unity movements, but they received such broad grassroots support from other parties, including members of the CCF, that the provincial council of the CCF, which had disapproved support for unity candidates, eventually endorsed both Rev. W.G. Brown in Saskatoon, and Dorise Nielsen in North Battleford. In recommending that the Provincial CCF Council support Nielsen, George Williams, the president of the Council, cited reasons of "justice as well as political

wisdom". Mrs. Nielsen, he believed, was "being persecuted by the Liberal machine in a most unfair manner",²⁷ and "it is possible that in exchange for CCF support...Mrs. Nielsen and her group might be willing to guarantee their support to the CCF in the next provincial election".²⁸

Thus, animosity towards the Liberals, the weakness of the CCF and Social Credit in Saskatchewan, and the determination of local communists to pursue a united front strategy, were all factors which contributed to the brief success of unity parties in Saskatoon and North Battleford. The personal popularity of Brown and Nielsen, both well known and trusted figures on the local scene, was important, too.²⁹

Another factor, probably much less important, was the sanction bestowed on such unity movements by W.D. Herridge, a Conservative heretic, who, inspired by Roosevelt's New Deal's activist philosophy of government, began his New Democracy Movement in March, 1939. Herridge called for a united front of progressive groups to defeat the old line parties in the next federal election. Each constituency group would be autonomous in formulating its platform. His movement was supported by Social Credit and the CPC, but rejected by the CCF.³⁰

New Democracy was in full swing in Saskatchewan by the summer of 1939, when both Brown and Nielsen were nominated, but it is relevant that in both constituencies, united reform groups had begun in 1938, before Herridge's

movement. Herridge's movement was really only a small part of a much larger movement for the unity of progressive groups against reactionary governments. Communists rather than Herridge can claim greater responsibility for the success of this movement where it occurred. In Saskatchewan, at least, this is one time when the party line was very much in tune with local conditions.

Endnotes

1. National Archives, Dorise Nielsen Papers, Volume 1, Memoirs, p. 293.
2. Peter Sinclair, "The Saskatchewan CCF and the Communist Party in the 1930's", Saskatchewan History, Winter, 1973, p. 3.
3. Ibid., p. 4.
4. Ivan Avakumovic, "The Communist Party of Canada and the Prairie Farmer: The Interwar Years", Western Perspectives, 1974.
5. Davod Monod, "The Agrarian Struggle, Rural Communism in Alberta and Saskatchewan 1926-1935", Social History, May, 1985, p. 99.
6. Ivan Avakumovic, op. cit., p. 85.
7. David Monod, op. cit., pp. 107-108.
8. Gerald Friesen, The Canadian Prairie, 1984, p. 415.
9. David Monod, op. cit., pp. 113-117.

William Kardash, who was born in northern Saskatchewan in 1912, joined the party in 1931, and worked in the National Office of the Farmers' Unity League in Saskatoon, 1932-1934, gave this account of the FUL in a letter to Faith Johnston, Sept. 7, 1987: "The FUL came on the scene because the farm organizations that were in existence did nothing, or very little, to help those farmers who were in a desperate situation. Evictions, foreclosures, farm sales were a daily occurrence. The FUL advocated direct action, while urging the governments to pass legislation for a moratorium on farm debts, a ban on evictions and foreclosures.... Mass hunger marches were organized in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Many families were helped to get municipal relief to enable their children to continue going to school....The policy advanced by the CPC at that time received support by those farmers who were in need of aid. It is difficult to fully appreciate the conditions the farmers faced during those dirty thirties....

10. Ivan Avakumovic, op. cit., p. 81.

11. David Monod, "Soldiers of the Plough: Popular Protest and Insurgency in Alberta and Saskatchewan 1918-1948", M.A. Thesis, McGill, 1983, pp. 200-201. Monod has based these conclusions on the research of Seymour Lipset who did a classic study of the CCF, Agrarian Socialism.
12. Peter Sinclair, op. cit., p. 7.
13. Ibid., p. 5.
14. Carlyle King, "A Beginning in Politics: Saskatoon CCF 1938-43", Saskatchewan History, Autumn, 1983, p. 104.
15. Norman Penner, Canadian Communism, The Stalin Years and Beyond, 1988, p. 130.
16. Saskatchewan Archives Board, CCF Pamphlets, radio address by George Williams, December 9, 1936, as quoted in Peter Sinclair, ibid., p. 4.
17. Interview with Minerva Miller, December 1, 1988.
18. Walter Wiggins, Saskatchewan, The Land and Its People, p. 54.
19. National Archives, Dorise Nielsen Papers, Volume 2, Life History #1.
20. National Archives, A.M. Nicholson Papers, C26, Transcript of tape #1, pp. 12-13.
21. Peter Sinclair, op. cit., p. 7.
22. Carlyle King, "A Beginning in Politics: Saskatoon CCF, 1938-43", Saskatchewan History, Autumn, 1983, pp. 102-114.
23. Paul Martin, A Very Public Life, Vol. 1, p. 67. See also Dorise Nielsen's election brochure, 1940, in which she advises voters not to be afraid that the Liberals will know how they have voted: "This election, the ballot paper will be thick enough that marking cannot be seen through", Sally Nielsen Carter, Private Papers.
24. Results: Liberals 38, CCF 11, Social Credit 2, Unity 2, The CCF's policy had been to run 30 candidates and arrange "saw-off's" in other constituencies. Tommy Douglas criticized this strategy of Saskatchewan CCF leader George Williams as "a terrible schmozzle" and thought, in the future the party should have nothing to do with such activities. As quoted in Elizabeth Smillie, op. cit., p. 23.

25. The Saskatoon Star Phoenix, July 4, 1939, pp. 3-4. The same article says that T.G. McManus, secretary of the Communist Party of Saskatchewan declared that Communists were ready to co-operate at constituency meetings to promote unity. The unity members were Mr. A.C. Stewart (Yorkton) and Mr. Warren (Bengough).

26. Elizabeth Smillie (op. cit.) mentions that the "United Progressives" formed a committee on October 8th, 1938, and began to draft a platform for the next federal election in North Battleford (p. 29). Her information is from the Western Producer, Nov. 17, 1938, "United Front of Progressives in North Battleford". She also says that a United Reform movement had had its first meeting in Saskatoon two weeks earlier, and that by December, 1938, united reform efforts were evident in Yorkton, Bengough, the Battlefords, Kindersley and Rosetown-Biggar federal constituencies (pp. 30-32).

27. During the election campaign the Nielsens had been served with an eviction notice. Christine Nielsen, who was eleven years old, remembers this incident vividly. Her father was away deer hunting, and she was bringing in some wood after dark when she saw a "snow plane" - a large motorized sleigh - approaching the farm. She ran to the house, terrified, and the three children literally clung to their mother's skirts as two men, one "the Liberal lawyer" from Spiritwood, delivered the eviction notice. Dorise was very angry. Like most of their neighbours, the Nielsen's mortgage was in arrears. It seems the quarter section on which their residence stood had been singled out for foreclosure to force Nielsen out of the election. She was able to use this "dirty trick" to great effect in her election campaign, and the Nielsens were not evicted after all. Conversation with Christine Nielsen, July 21, 1989.

28. SAB, CCF Papers, CCF Provincial Council, George Williams to the Provincial Council, February 13, 1940.

29. Rev. Brown died shortly after his election, and Agnes Macphail ran as a United Reform candidate in his place, but lost the by-election. As for Mrs. Nielsen, apparently she continued to be popular with many CCF members in Saskatchewan because they believed she was truly fighting "the battle of the underdog". For several years, the CCF leadership, although aware that Nielsen was working with the CCP, restrained public criticism of her for fear of alienating its own supporters in Saskatchewan. See exchange of letters between George Williams and M.J. Coldwell, Jan. 5, 7, 21 and Feb. 24, 1942, SAB-CCF papers.

30. See The Saskatoon Star Phoenix, July 4, 1939, p. 3; July 6, 1939, p. 11; July 12, 1939, p. 2; July 13, 1939, p. 3.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The role of women in farm organizations and in the CCF in Saskatchewan has been studied by Georgina Taylor; unfortunately, the roles of women in the Communist Party are not as clearly documented. The only secondary sources on women in the CPC are the writings of Joan Sangster which provide a very valuable overview of how women's issues and women's roles have been handled in both the CPC and the CCF (1920-1950). The problem here is that covering such a mammoth topic allows little scope for dealing thoroughly with regional variations. Another problem, of course, is that women in the CPC in the 1930's were probably fewer in number than those in farm organizations and in the CCF, and those still living are in many cases, less willing to talk to historians about their experiences.

Despite these problems, it is clear that women were a vital part of all these organizations, and probably played more prominent roles in the 1930's than at any other time until the emergence of the modern women's movement. Their prominence is explained by several factors. Probably the most important factor is that women like men, were politicized by the poverty they experienced during the depression. Changing the system seemed vital to individual and collective survival. Another important factor, however, was the existence, even before the depression, of various

province-wide organizations that mobilized women. The Homemakers Clubs of Saskatchewan, part of the extension work of the University of Saskatchewan, had been founded in 1911. In 1913, a more radical women's group, the Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers, was founded, largely because of the efforts of Violet McNaughton to involve farm women not only in the SGGA, but also in agitating for reforms of particular interest to women such as women's suffrage.¹ When the SGGA merged with the Farmers' Union to form the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) in the mid-twenties, the UFC did not have a separate women's section, but its constitution guaranteed that it would have a female, as well as a male president and that there would always be two other women on its provincial board of directors. Although all of these organizations put class interests of the farm community first, and specifically women's interests, second, they encouraged strong women leaders such as Sophia Dixon and Louise Lucas to develop their talents, and they sometimes served as mentors and role models to other women.² There is little doubt that all three western reform parties of the 1930's: Social Credit, the CCF and the CPC, benefited from the groundwork laid by these earlier organizations.

Another very important factor in explaining the prominence of women in Saskatchewan politics in this period is demographics. Saskatchewan was overwhelmingly rural and

had experienced the recent large scale influx of non-English speaking immigrants. Among rural people at the time the largest group of educated, articulate, English-speaking adults were likely to be women teachers or former teachers. It seems that both the CCF and the CPC deliberately solicited women's support for this reason. According to Tommy Douglas, such women were usually good educators or propagandizers, emphasizing the human issues - "not so airy-fairy and theoretical as some male politicians". Such women could also read and understand the literature, and were competent at writing letters.³

Gladys Strum, CCF MP from Saskatchewan (1945-1949), is a good example of a prairie woman politicized during the depression. She had taught in a one-room school before marrying a farmer in 1926. Although her husband had been interested in progressive politics in the 1920's, Gladys had little interest until the Depression struck. In 1935 her "conversion" became complete when she heard Louise Lucas, a leading member of the CCF, speak at a Homeworkers Convention. Strum had also impressed Lucas, who passed her name on to another CCF organizer. Before long, Strum was phoned and invited to speak for the CCF. Thus began her twenty-nine year career in politics.⁴

Minerva Miller (then Minerva Cooper) had a similar initiation. In 1934 she moved with her husband and two young children to a homestead near Porcupine Plain

northeast of Saskatoon. They had moved there as part of a relief plan because her husband was unemployed. It was here that her political education and her political activity began. The area was very poor. Many of their neighbours were CCF. Apart from discussions with neighbours, she and her husband gained their political education from listening to the radio and reading. Minerva was first invited to speak for the CCF by Sandy Nicolson, a United Church minister, and CCF organizer in the area. It was while speaking for the CCF that she met communists, who impressed her by their knowledge and their interest in her. Although she did not join the party when she was first approached, by 1937 she had joined, and she decided not to reveal her membership in order to build a broader base of support for the causes she was involved in. At that time, as well as organizing women's clubs for the CCF, she was helping to organize support for loyalists in the Spanish Civil War. She organized a meeting for Norman Bethune at Prince Albert in the summer of 1937.⁵

It seems that not only did these reform parties attract great numbers of men and women seeking solutions to desperate problems, but that the parties were willing to offer women more prominent roles than the main-line parties at the time, and that many women said "yes". Dorise Nielsen was not unusual; she was one of many women and men who became active in politics "for the good of the cause",

or possibly for more personal reasons, but with little hope of personal material gain. None of these parties had patronage to distribute, and in the 1930's, their prospect of having any in the near future was dim. Yet there was fund raising and political education to be done, provincial and federal campaigns to organize. Under such circumstances educated, English-speaking women who because of their socialization otherwise may have lacked confidence in their abilities to organize, or to speak in public, or to compete with men for positions, experienced expanded opportunities to enter the public arena.

Although the roles women played in political organizations were often limited by sexism and family responsibilities, a few of these women won seats at the provincial or federal level, possibly indicating a "second wave" of female political participation: between 1917 and 1921, seven women had been elected to provincial legislatures in Canada, all in the four western provinces. In 1921, Agnes Macphail, a candidate for the United Farmers of Ontario had been elected federally. During the second wave, 1933-39, six women won provincial seats, again all from the West, and all but one were members of either the CCF or the Social Credit.⁶ Of course, many more women ran and lost. In Saskatchewan, the CCF ran one woman in the 1934 provincial election, and two in 1938. Federally, Louise Lucas ran for the CCF in the Battlefords, and

Dorothy Pope in Melford. Both these constituencies are in northern Saskatchewan, adjacent to the constituency of North Battleford, represented by Dorise Nielsen, 1940-1945.

The CPC, like the CCF, was gaining new female as well as male members in the 1930's particularly in the late 1930's.⁷ Although a large portion of new female members came from the party's main ethnic groups (Jewish, Ukrainian, Finnish), and although women continued to be a minority of 12% in the party,⁸ it seems that the expansion of the party in the popular front period also allowed non-ethnic prairie women to assume leadership roles. In an interview with Joan Sangster, Elsie Beeching recalled:

...before WWII women had a certain place in the movement....at that time it seems as if half or more of the local (Regina) leadership were women.⁹

Again, the position of women in the CPC may have been more prominent in the prairies than in eastern Canada. Certainly in the 1945 federal elections, the first in which the communists (LPP) attempted to run a full slate of candidates, the party ran three women in Saskatchewan, two in Alberta, but only one in Ontario.¹⁰ I believe one reason for the prominent roles played by western women in the CPC in this period may have been the demographic issue, too. Because of the expansion in the popular front period, in many communities the party needed able, literate, articulate, English-speaking people to organize, to educate

and to run at election time, yet most of its members were still from the ethnic communities. The party also valued the participation of WASP's in prominent roles because it helped the CPC counteract its reputation of being a group of foreign agitators. Thus women gained greater prominence in the CPC in the late thirties and early forties, in Saskatchewan, and possibly elsewhere, not because the party had decided to implement its policy of women's equality, but given the demographics and nativist sentiment of the time, and the party's popular front policy of trying to attract middle class men and women to the party and its mass organizations, the CPC needed all the WASP talent it could muster. Once communist men began joining the armed services in 1941, the need for women who could take over probably increased. After the war, the picture changed dramatically as the men returned and the party's popularity and thus its need for workers, began to decline. It is not surprising that Elsie Beeching recalls the dramatic change in the roles of women in the Regina CPC before and after the war.

On hindsight, however, all of these women whether members of the CCF or CPC were mobilized under false pretenses; the prevailing ideology in both parties was that women and men were equal partners in the struggle for a new social and economic order. In fact, women in leadership positions often saw their main task as mobilizing other

women by urging them to educate themselves about politics so that they could, with men, take up the burden of transforming the public sphere. One assumption underlying such a mobilization strategy is that the door had been opened to women, that these parties were equal opportunity employers, yet both parties, despite the rhetoric of equality, continued to be run by male elites. In Saskatchewan, the CCF formed the government from 1944-1964 yet despite their efforts and their experience in political work, few women were able to get CCF nominations in winnable constituencies, and none of the three women who did serve in the provincial legislature was offered a cabinet post.¹¹ When the CCF government amended the Saskatchewan Public Service Act in 1946, it did not ban discrimination on the basis of sex in the public service, despite a campaign mounted by CCF women from across Canada.¹²

Similarly, the CPC made specific efforts to draw women into communist organizations during the Popular Front period (1935-39), for example by publicizing the misogyny of fascist regimes, by inviting middle class groups of church women and professional women to join conferences on war and fascism, and by directing CPC women to involve themselves in women's groups and gradually introduce political subjects;¹³ however, at the national level, there continued to be no women in positions of power

despite the influx of women, and the presence of at least two outstanding women who had been working for the party as educators and labour leaders since the 1920's, Annie Buller and Becky Buhay.¹⁴

A woman who joined the CPC in Cape Breton in the early 1930's, and then moved to Toronto in 1935 where she remained a member of the party until 1956, says that despite the image the party tried to project, and despite the stand on women's issues such as equal pay legislation, in its own operations the party was definitely anti-feminist. In Cape Breton, she was the first woman allowed to join her party group, over the objections of most of the members who "didn't want any skirts around". In Toronto she was bothered by the condescending way in which some party leaders treated Becky Buhay and Annie Buller.¹⁵

In both parties, then, there was a glass ceiling on women's mobility within the party, and policy decisions were made by men, but in the 1930's these limitations were probably not as evident as they later became. Both parties promised a better future for all people, and in some respects, particularly on the prairies, their organizations encouraged women's participation in non-traditional roles.

Women who did succeed, against all the odds, in running in elections, or playing other prominent roles, may have been patronized by male elites in their parties, but by

others (and possibly even those elites), they were "romanticized as brave little women who fought giants".¹⁶ This romanticization of exceptional women, which occurred in both parties, and which seems to have a long tradition in socialism, put the women involved in a very strange position; while lauding women for breaking the stereotype of the homebound woman, at the same time both parties continued to reflect societal values by idealizing motherhood and the preservation of family life.¹⁷ The double burden of career and family, which is so familiar to women today, was thus imposed on some women by political parties who considered their views on "the women question" to be progressive.

One of the women who took up the challenge, Annie Buller, has been praised by William Kashtan, long-time General Secretary of the CPC, as an exceptional woman who managed "such varied tasks as spokeswoman and organizer for the CPC, union organizer, builder of the working class press, spreader of Marxist literature throughout the country, and in her spare time, gave attention to her family".¹⁸ He goes on to say that Annie fought against "feminist views that made man the enemy rather than capitalism", and that she realized that the only way to solve the woman question was to promote "the unity of working men and women".¹⁹ Kashtan's view, written in the 1970's reflects certain views that existed when he

joined the party in the 1930's and persisted: that it is heroic for people to devote all their energy to the party, that somehow a family can be raised "in spare time" and that any questioning of sexual status within the party serves to disrupt the working class unity necessary to achieve socialism.

A similar set of values prevailed in the CCF in Saskatchewan, where Gladys Strum, who was doing full-time unpaid organizational work for the CCF (1938-44) (work that was salaried in some locations), made some enemies by insisting on receiving expenses so that she could have someone to help with her housework.²⁰

There is little doubt that the reform parties attracted the support of many women for several reasons: the existence of economic and social conditions that caused the politicization of thousands of women and men; the philosophy of many women, fostered by maternal feminism as well as socialism, that women had a duty to act in the public, as well as the private sphere; and the particular demographics of western Canada, with its large ethnic population, that encouraged the recruitment of able, articulate women to politics.

The evidence that all parties, whether reform parties or mainline parties, were run by male leaders who set the agenda is very clear to us today, but for women involved in the reform parties in the 1930's and 1940's, the case was

probably not as clear: the parties did pay lip service to equality and some women achieved prominence in them. Also, the causes these parties fought for were so important to the women involved that they may have felt justified in putting women's issues on the backburner, for the sake of party unity. If, like Strum, they were ambitious women who became frustrated because they realized women and women's issues were not really taken seriously by their party, they had only the choice to continue to work within their party or to drop out of politics, for truly egalitarian political parties that gave priority to women's issues and allowed talented women equal opportunities to men, did not exist.

Endnotes

1. Georgina Taylor, "Should I Drown Myself Now or Later?, The Isolation of Rural Women in Saskatchewan and Their Participation in Homemakers' Clubs, the Farm Movement and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation 1910-1967", Women: Isolation and Bonding The Ecology of Gender (1987), p. 84.
2. Ibid.
3. T.C. Douglas, June 15, 1982, interview taped by Georgina Taylor.
4. Georgina Taylor, "Gladys Strum: Farm Woman, Teacher and Politician", Canadian Women's Studies, Winter, 1981.
5. Interview with Minerva Miller, November, 1988.
6. Veronica Strong-Boag, The New Day Recalled, Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939 (1988).
7. Joan Sangster, "Canadian Women in Radical Politics and Labour, 1920-1950", Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University, 1984, p. 295.
8. Joan Sangster, Dreams of Equality (1988), p. 125.
9. Joan Sangster, op. cit., p. 307.
10. The Canadian Tribune, May 12, 1945, p. 10; May 19, 1945, pp. 8-9; June 2, 1945, p. 13.
11. Georgina Taylor, "Should I Drown Myself Now or Later?...", op. cit., pp. 86-88.
12. Joan Sangster, Dreams of Equality, p. 214.
13. Ibid., p. 126.
14. Joan Sangster, Ph.D. dissertation, p. 304.
15. Interview with Virginia MacLeod, June 12, 1988.
16. Georgina Taylor, "Equals and Partners, An Examination of the Roles of Twelve Women Active in the CCF 1932-1967", M.A. Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1983, p. 177.
17. Joan Sangster, op. cit., p. 314.
18. Louise Watson, She Never Was Afraid, p. xiii.
19. Ibid., pp. xiii-xiv.

20. Georgina Taylor, "Gladys Strum: Far Woman, Teacher and Politician", Canadian Women's Studies, Winter, 1986.

CHAPTER FOUR

JUDY O'GRADY

The politicization of Dorise Nielsen was unusual, but not unique. Many women became socialists in the 1930's and some of them joined the CPC. Of those who did become communists, few, like Nielsen, had non-communist husbands, few took on full-time party work while raising children, and none were successful in winning an election at either the federal or provincial level. In later life, Nielsen was persistent in saying that she had done nothing extraordinary, and she attributed her type of activism to the desperate times in which she lived:

...the thirties were not ordinary times and I was more or less forced by circumstance to play the role I did in North Battleford.]

The implication is that had it not been for the depression, Nielsen would have been content to remain a farmer's wife, tending her children and her chickens and her garden, and tuning in to the Metropolitan Opera on Saturday afternoons. Possibly that is true, but we will never know. The depression, it seems, was a major factor accounting for Nielsen's politicization and for her initial political success. There were other factors, which I have already mentioned in the political environment of Saskatchewan that explain the increased political participation of women in the thirties. In addition, there are factors particular to Nielsen: her independent spirit,

her sense of isolation, her impulsiveness, and her ability.

In January, 1927, Doris Webber immigrated from London, England, to take up a teaching position in a one-room school in northern Saskatchewan. She was twenty-five years old. Her job had been arranged by the Fellowship of the Maple Leaf, an organization of British origin that aimed to preserve Canada's British character, but Nielsen had no such missionary zeal. She simply wanted to get away from home, away from the "genteel middle-class conformity" of her family.² Her life was dull - she had been teaching for three years for the London County Council, and living at home with her widowed mother, a widowed sister twenty years older than Doris, and an old cousin who was her mother's companion. If World War I had not caused the death of her first love,³ and many other young men of her age, she might have married and stayed in England. There was nothing else she particularly wanted to do. The choices, however, were limited, and therefore she chose to plunge into a strange overseas society.

At this point, then, Nielsen was a young woman of above average intelligence and attractiveness who was not willing to settle for a life she found personally unsatisfying. She had refused to marry a man approved by her family, and had decided to come to Canada despite the disapproval of her mother. She was also a woman who had always lived in a household where women made major decisions and kept a stiff

upper lip even when the sky was falling in around them.⁴

She had learned well how to hide any inner turmoil with a gracious, calm public persona.

The area Nielsen came to had been opened up after World War I: settlers had few acres under cultivation, roads were poor, and medical care almost inaccessible. Nielsen's school was six miles from the nearest post office, Norbury, and seventy miles from a railway.⁵ For Dorise everything was strange and difficult. She boarded with a young couple, filled her time with school work and often cried herself to sleep, "wondering how I could go on living this strange kind of life".⁶ Yet she did not want to return home:

I would think of that old house....with three lonely old women in it....How could I go back to living there again?⁷

She solved her dilemma by deciding to accept a marriage proposal from Peter Nielsen, a war veteran who had come to the area in 1920, having been granted a quarter section under the Soldier Settlement Act.⁸ They were married in September, 1927, only eight months after Dorise had arrived in Canada. Although there were elements of romance in the situation,⁹ and the war somehow provided a link between them, her decision to marry Nielsen, made quickly in the summer of 1927, was not based on love, but on the desire for children, and for "an anchor in Canada to stop me being too lonely and drifting back to England again".¹⁰ On her

marriage, Doris Webber became Dorise Nielsen, an interesting name change, reflecting, surely, some desire for distinction.

Pete Nielsen, it seems, was a quiet, easy-going man, who was tolerant of his wife's inexperience as a housekeeper, and willing to help her learn. He was twelve years older than she was, and had been keeping house for himself for a long time. In some ways, their married life got off to a good start. Though they had just a one room log house, the future was promising: wheat was selling at \$1.00 a bushel, a railway spur and a new town (Spiritwood) would soon be established near their farm. For a wedding gift, Dorise's sisters sent her a crate of linens, a sewing machine and a large cheque. Nielsen was soon aware that her marriage would not be the companionate marriage she expected: Pete Nielsen did not want to discuss plans together or share his feelings. He spent his evenings reading two farm newspapers.¹¹ Nevertheless, Dorise was determined to make the best of things. She tried to "make up in enthusiasm" what she "lacked in experience".¹² She planned and planted a big garden, learned to cook for a threshing gang, and "painted more than one picture of prairie lilies".¹³

In several ways, Nielsen's quick decision to marry and remain in Canada, and her active determination to "make the best of it" are typical of her. She hated passivity -

whether it was the "middle-class conformity" of her family in England, or the apathy she encountered among some of her poor neighbours in Saskatchewan. She was willing to undertake new unknown tasks, to dive into a strange, new life with enthusiasm. Perhaps Nielsen's impulsive marriage illustrates the courage and ignorance of youth, and the lack of options other than marriage available to energetic, talented women that impelled such a "leap of faith", but it also tells us something specifically about this woman that remained true for the rest of her life. When she felt the need for a major change in her life, she had the courage to make it, and to immerse herself in the new life she had chosen. Thus she chose to join the Communist Party, to run for Parliament, to leave her husband, and eventually to leave Canada and to make a new life in China.

Nielsen later attributed her politicization to her anger at the system for the desperate conditions and needless tragedies that occurred around her in the 1930's, and also to her own sense of isolation and her need to be active outside her home. The depression brought more hardship to her area, which was poor to begin with. As wheat prices fell, incomes dropped and it became more and more difficult to get adequate food, clothing, and medical care. An influx of families who had been resettled from drought areas further south put a further strain on the community. Nielsen's second child, born in 1930, died in

infancy probably of dysentery, and her fourth child, born in 1935, developed rickets. By 1936, the Nielsens, like most families in their area, were intermittently on relief, getting \$11.25 a month to support their family of five.

During the thirties the Nielsens suffered as other families did, but they were also able to provide some leadership and help in practical ways probably because they were better educated than most of their neighbours. Their oldest daughter, Christine, remembers her mother writing letters for neighbours, going off on the horse to change the dressing of a man who had received a nasty wound, distributing used clothing sent by the Fellowship of the Maple Leaf, and designing a maple leaf rug that she hooked with other women and raffled to raise money for the school. People came to her father for haircuts, and if he was not home, her mother did them. Although the Nielsens let most of their land to the neighbouring Sass family for a share of the crop, they grew and preserved their own food. Dorise kept the chickens, and occasionally sold butter. Peter kept a stud horse. They were busy and life was hard, but they may have had more time for political activity because of their arrangement with the Sass family.

For Dorise, this period in her life saw the emergence of two major themes or concerns that became important in her personal and her public life for many years. The first was a concern for health care, particularly maternal and

child health. She witnessed a number of tragedies that she knew could have been avoided with proper health services. I have mentioned a few of the problems her own family faced, and there were others. People hesitated to call a doctor because he was far away, and they had no money to pay him. Once a family went on relief they had to apply to a relief officer before seeking medical care. Because of all these problems, the doctor was not called, or he was called too late, or perhaps he was called but he arrived too late, and consequently children died of childhood ailments and women died in childbirth. One of Nielsen's neighbours, who had been in labour for three days, gave birth and died before the doctor arrived.¹⁴

Another theme was a woman's right to her own time, her own independent development. Nielsen made a determined effort not to become a slave to her home and her family, as she perceived many other women doing. She needed time to herself, time to pursue her own interests so that she could preserve her sanity. In a two room house with three children, all the canning and cooking to do, and clothes to make, it could not have been easy to find time for herself, but she was determined to do it. She had a passionate interest in books, and may have gained her earliest political education from the books she was able to borrow from the Wheat Pool Library.¹⁵ At some point in the early thirties the Nielsens got a radio. Every Saturday

afternoon, Dorise listened to the opera. Christine remembers that "When the Metropolitan opera came on, Dad left the house. Mum would sit in Dad's armchair and listen, and we'd have to be quiet or get out".¹⁶ Dorise also refused to do outdoor work on the farm, such as fetching water and milking the cows. Possibly she was influenced by the stereotypes of men's work and women's work, but more likely she was afraid that once she started working outdoors, as well as indoors, she would simply have too much work to do.

Nielsen was seeking an individual solution to a universal problem - the difficulty of women finding time or space for themselves apart from their families. It was a problem that Nielsen was able to name, possibly because it was an issue in farm women's organizations in the 1920's,¹⁷ but more likely because her own needs were acute. She could find intellectual companionship neither with her husband, nor with neighbouring women, who "had nothing to talk about but cooking and children".¹⁸

It was this isolation, as well as her burning anger at social injustice that led to Nielsen's interest in socialism. She described her motives in letters to her daughters many years later:

I started work in the beginning to escape the prison walls of Norbury closing round me and burying me forever...¹⁹

...in the beginning I became interested in politics simply because it offered me something to think about to relieve the monotony of life during the depression...20

Tracing the path of Nielsen's political activity in the thirties and her political allegiances during that time is a difficult task. It may be impossible to establish exactly when she joined the CPC, but it is probable that she was influenced by communists and that her sympathies were with them before she joined the CCF. In a brief life history written while in China, she gave the following account of her initiation into the party:

An old German (Bob Bowie) organized a group of seven poor farmers into a party club and made contact with the party in the provincial city of Regina. This old comrade, walking 20 miles to see me and 20 miles home again, made many visits to encourage me to join in the struggle for relief, food and clothing. He introduced me to Marxism and taught me all I knew about the revolutionary struggle in Europe. In 1931 the CPC became illegal. Early in 1932 I joined this small party group secretly. It was decided by the provincial committee of the party, which still operated undercover, that I was to openly join the CCF which had just been formed....21

This account must be used with some caution because not only was it written long after the events described, but it may also have been written for Chinese consumption during the Cultural Revolution, and therefore might date Nielsen's party membership earlier than it actually occurred. There is other evidence, however, that tends to substantiate her account: the activity of the communist-led Farmers Unity League in her area in the early 1930's, and her friendship with Bob Paul, which also dates from the early thirties.

Bob Paul and his wife, Cecil, were both school teachers who moved to the area in 1930, and became close friends of the Nielsens. Bob eventually left his wife and lived with Dorise briefly after the war. Bob was an American and his father had been a member of the International Workers of the World.²² Possibly Bob joined the party before Dorise and his commitment may have influenced her. It is also possible that her commitment influenced him, but we will probably never know. In any case, they both joined the CCF and campaigned together in the 1938 provincial election in which Bob was a CCF candidate. Later in 1938, they were both involved in establishing the United Progressive Movement which nominated Nielsen as its federal candidate. In the federal campaign, which began in the summer of 1939, Bob Paul served as Nielsen's campaign manager.

Evidence that Bob Paul was involved in forging the unity movement as a communist himself (though he professed his allegiance to the CCF) is contained in a letter, undated, but probably written in 1942 or 1943, to "friends" explaining why a similar movement would not be successful in the 1943 Saskatchewan provincial election. In the letter Paul refers to the "DC" (district chairman, a position in the CPC) who seems to have been pressing him to develop a unity movement in the provincial riding of Turtleford, which was part of the federal constituency of North Battleford.²³

Whenever Nielsen committed herself to the CPC, it is clear that Nielsen's commitment was not superficial and was not dependent on her relationship with any particular person. It is also clear that although she was concerned about the problems of women in the family and in the public sphere, she did not join the party primarily out of a concern for women's rights. She came to believe, very early, that the culprit which ultimately caused poverty, depression, fascism and war was the competitive capitalist system. The solution was for men and women to work together for socialism. For women, and for men, too, this solution meant putting the needs of humanity before those of their own families²⁴ - it meant, in other words self-sacrifice and male-female harmony of purpose.

Early in 1937, Nielsen began to write a series of letters to the women's editor of the Western Producer, Violet McNaughton, under the pseudonym, Judy O'Grady.²⁵ These nineteen letters, written over a period of two years, possibly as part of Nielsen's party work, show her understanding of Marxism, her defence of the Soviet experiment, and also tell us some of the sources of her ideas. For her, Marx's analysis of history as progressing in logical stages from feudalism, to capitalism, to socialism, makes sense. She urges readers to be active in working for a socialist society, to study what is happening in the USSR and thus to take their "rightful place in the

evolutionary process"²⁶ She defends communism against the charges of another writer that there is religious persecution in the USSR, pointing out that the new Soviet constitution guarantees freedom of religion to all people. She portrays communism as true Christianity, a new world order based on brotherly love, not the escapist opiate that Christianity has become for most people.²⁷ Not only do communists understand how the economic system must be changed in order to provide equal opportunities for all, but they are also the people who act on their convictions:

...Who is it today that is working among the lowest strata of our society, stretching out the helping hand, and showing them how to help themselves? Is it our organized Christians? I think not.

The Communists, alone, because of their analysis of the cause, can supply us with a solution of our present difficulties. They are the real helpers and comrades of the destitute and hungry, proving by their actions their real love for humanity...²⁸

Nielsen's blunt letters led to some lively exchanges in which the idealism on both sides is astonishing. One reader, after describing persecution and censorship in the USSR ends her letter, "Let us be thankful for our still safe country, Canada, under protection of a mighty and blessed empire, blessed because its rulers fear and worship the living God...."²⁹

No doubt by this time Nielsen's political education had shown her that the British Empire was not blessed but exploitive, and she would find this blind patriotism infuriating. Kathleen Rapka, who joined the party in the

early 1940's, remembers the reading of The Problem of India by Palme Dutt, as being a revelation to her. She had grown up with parents who thought Britain was always in the right. Nielsen was reading Dutt,³⁰ as well as Edgar Snow's Red Star Over China, books by Anna Louise Strong, and Joseph Freeman, both American communists, and pamphlets by John Strachey, one of the major Marxist theorists in Britain in the 1930's. Some of the articles she recommends to Western Producer readers were published by the League Against Fascism and War, a communist sponsored organization that had a broad membership in Canada in the late thirties. When one reader questioned the bias of her sources of information on the USSR, Nielsen defended them as non-communist. That was no doubt true of some of her sources of information, but not of most of them as far as I can tell.³¹ Many of the books Nielsen mentions were published in cheap editions by "The Left Book Club" and were probably widely distributed. A woman who taught in the North Battleford area in the late 1930's, and belonged to neither the CCF or the CPC remembers reading a lot about the Soviet Union at that time and that, on the whole, she believed what she read.³²

It seems then, that Nielsen was impressed by what she read and by the activity of communists on behalf of the poor, possibly from her own experience. She was not concerned about the "godlessness" of the Soviets which

seems to have been a major concern for other writers to the Western Producer, for she viewed organized religion as a sham. In addition, she was particularly concerned about building a united front of left wing groups to prevent the spread of fascism. She urged readers not to fear participating in mixed groups, for it was the divisions in the left that had allowed fascism to triumph in Italy and Germany.³³ Helping to build the unity of left wing groups was the task the party had assigned her,³⁴ and it was probably her reason for joining the CCF. The letters she wrote in 1938, when she was active in building the United Progressive Movement in her constituency do not support communism as pointedly as the 1937 letters. Although they advocate fundamental changes in the economic system as vital to reform, one letter specifically defends the CCF as prescribing fundamental changes that would restore the world economic system to health in contrast to Social Credit.³⁵ It seems, however, that her allegiance to the CPC rather than to the CCF was based on her belief that communists were more committed to socialism than the CCF was, even though, at this time, both parties had similar platforms. Later on, when the CCF was having success at the polls, Nielsen wrote to Violet McNaughton:

If only the CCF does not bend over backward in its efforts to attract all people, and forget its socialism it will be O.K. They have a great responsibility.³⁶

Since these letters were written to the women's page editor, their particular purpose was to educate women and thus mobilize them for the cause. In one letter, Nielsen described the reasons many women stay out of politics: their over-concern with having a "spotless home" which leaves them no time to "tidy their minds which in so many cases are more dilapidated than their homes"; their sense of inferiority to men which tells them to "leave it to George"; their "lazy-mindedness" when it comes to reading a book; and the old (religious) ideas about enduring suffering instead of seeking the cause of it.³⁷ In another letter she described the woman with "the Victorian mind"; the "nice little woman" who never stretches her mind to concern herself with anything beyond her own home³⁸, and in yet another she urged all women to have the "courage, sacrifice and devotion to ideals to place the claims of humanity in general before those of one's own family....to be the true mates of men and mothers of the race".³⁹

Altogether, Nielsen seems to have had a dim view of women, although not of women's potential. She seems to believe that if women would only "buck up" (a favourite expression of hers) and do their share, we could have a better world. The implication is that men are already doing their share, but women are slackers. Women must somehow work harder to become worthy of participating in

the public sphere with men. This analysis ignores the private sphere in which women had the major burden of housework and child care.

Nielsen knew the problems of the private sphere very well, but at this point she was most concerned with fighting traditional ideas of *Kindern, Kuehen and Kirchen* that in the minds of many people still relegated women to the private sphere alone. She was neglecting her home to go on speaking tours for the CCF and to organize women's study groups, and was encountering some people who thought she was "a fantastic specimen" who "had betrayed my sex by refusing to stick to my own house".⁴⁰ She had the courage and the confidence and the need to break the stereotypes and she expected the same of other women.

Although Nielsen sometimes appealed to women to take action as mothers caring for the future of the world because of concern for their children, she was not a maternal feminist. Her appeals to women as mothers were tactics to mobilize other women for the causes she believed in. She also appealed to women by contrasting the increasing educational opportunities for women in the USSR to the declining opportunities for women in Germany.⁴¹ She believed that women might have particular concerns that would engage them in the struggle for socialism, but she did not believe they had any sort of moral superiority to bring to politics. They did, however, have a duty and a

right just as men did to take their place in the public sphere.

Like most women of her generation, Nielsen did not seriously question women's primary responsibility for the care of home and children. She looked forward to the day when women's responsibilities would be eased by the state's provision of universal daycare, and the socialization of other household tasks. In the meantime, women themselves must try to find the time to make significant contributions in the public sphere by setting their priorities and working very hard.

In some ways Nielsen had harnessed herself to a system of thinking like the old religious systems she denounced: working for communism required suffering and faith in deferred rewards. Even though the rewards might conceivably happen in this life women were certain to bear a double burden in the meantime. There may, however, have been some present rewards for Nielsen in adopting a Marxist-Leninist perspective and in undertaking political work. Marxism held out the ideal of women and men, both working together on an equal basis to achieve a new society. It may have sanctioned Nielsen's natural inclination to move into the public sphere where she could find the intellectual stimulation and possibly the recognition that she needed. Refusing to stick to her own house did not make her a "fantastic specimen" in the movement; she

was accepted as a valued comrade, working in conjunction with men, on an equal basis, or so it seemed, and towards a common goal.

Beatrice Farnsworth, in Aleksandra Kollontai, Socialism, Feminism and the Bolshevik Revolution (1980) has arrived at some insights about Kollontai that I believe may apply to Nielsen, as well. Farnsworth believes that Kollontai, and most non-conformists, initially embrace a cause more for personal reasons than for abstract political ones.⁴² Kollontai, like Nielsen, married to be free, but she soon became bored; the life of a housewife became a cage, and she sought an adult identity beyond that of wife and mother. "She wanted to be loved, and she also felt a need to achieve".⁴³ "Marxism... provided that structure of meaning into which she could fit her own experience.... and by means of which she could remove the guilt from her discontent with the domestic role".⁴⁴

Both women were feminists in that each asserted her right to decide her own destiny, but since neither one had found reproductive work personally satisfying, they were comfortable with the Marxist emphasis on the importance of productive work and its consequent under-valuing of reproductive work. Both viewed economic independence as a key factor in women's emancipation. This idea was in accord with Engels' Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, the basis of party doctrine on the women

question, and was probably supported by their own experience. A fundamental theme in Kollontai's writing is that women should "subordinate the emotional side of their lives and develop the kind of inner autonomy that would enable a young woman, like a young man, to do important work".⁴⁵ Nielsen, too, believed that "we must cast off the slavery of the home as it exists today, and gain our economic freedom and equality", and believed that "Marxian socialism" was "the only road to that freedom".⁴⁶

Nielsen and Kollontai each chose to work in a man's world and it is not surprising that they did not question in any substantial way, the formula for revolution that had already been established by a male elite. Both women believed that the revolutionary Marxism they supported was the surest road to a new and better society in which all forms of economic and social injustice, including the oppression of women, could be brought to an end. Their confidence that socialism alone would liberate women was misplaced, but working for socialism was, in some respects, a liberating process for them: it gave each of them the opportunity to develop their abilities in a role other than wife and mother.

Endnotes

1. National Archives, Nicholson Papers, letter from Dorise Nielsen to Mr. and Mrs. A. Nicholson, September 4, 1975.
2. National Archives, Dorise Nielsen Papers, Memoirs, p. 276.
3. National Archives, Dorise Nielsen Papers, Vol. 1, Memoirs, pp. 126-268. Doris had met Laurie Gilchrist and his family during a summer holiday in Devon in 1916, and had spent the next summer in Cornwall with them. In the summer of 1918, Laurie was killed on an RAF training flight.
4. Dorise's father had been ill when she was born and had died when she was six. One brother, Ro, was killed in World War I. The husband of her sister, Nell, had died in the influenza epidemic that followed the war.
5. National Archives, Dorise Nielsen Papers, Memoirs, p. 356.
6. Ibid., p. 356.
7. Ibid., p. 356.
8. Sally Nielsen Carter Private Papers. In 1921, Pete Nielsen had applied for and received another quarter section under the Dominion Lands Act.
9. Nielsen, either because he was chairman of the school board, or because he owned a horse and sleigh, had met Nielsen at the railhead on her arrival and driven her to Norbury through a blizzard.
10. Sally Nielsen Carter Private Papers, letter from Dorise Nielsen to Sally Nielsen, January 5, 1967.
11. National Archives, Dorise Nielsen Papers, Memoirs, p. 400.
12. Ibid., p. 401.
13. Ibid., p. 402. Nielsen's memoirs, written in the 1970's for her children, are illustrated by her own sketches.
14. Taped interview, Christine Nielsen to Georgia Taylor, July, 1987.

15. Dorise Nielsen, "Twelve Years Homesteading", The Star Weekly, August 31, 1940.
16. Taped interview, Christine Nielsen to Georgina Taylor, July, 1987.
17. Marilyn Barker, "Help for Rural Farm Homes: The Campaign to End Housework Drudgery in Rural Saskatchewan in the 1920's", Scientia Canadensis, June, 1985.
18. Dorise Nielsen, "Twelve Years Homesteading", The Star Weekly, August 31, 1940.
19. National Archives, Christine Wong Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Christine Nielsen Wong, November 23, 1966.
20. Sally Nielsen Carter Private Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Sally Nielsen, January 5, 1967.
21. National Archives, Dorise Nielsen Papers, Vol. 2, Life History 1.
22. Interview with Christine Nielsen, April 1986.
23. National Archives, Dorise Nielsen Papers, Volume 2, letter beginning "Dear Friends" and ending "BP".
24. The Western Producer, September 23, 1937.
25. When writing to close friends in the party, Nielsen often signed herself Judy. She chose the name from a Kipling poem, "The Ladies": "For the Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters under their skins".
26. The Western Producer, Feb. 25, 1937.
27. The Western Producer, June 24, 1937
28. The Western Producer, Sept. 9, 1937.
29. The Western Producer, June 3, 1937.
30. The Western Producer, March 11, 1937, she recommended the analysis of fascism in Palme Dutt's Fascism and the Social Revolution.
31. John Strachey left the Communist Party of Great Britain over the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, and later became a member of the Labour government. David Lewis, The Good Fight, 1981, pp. 297-8.
32. Interview with Nora Kelly, July, 1988.

33. The Western Producer, June 3, 1937.
34. National Archives, Dorise Nielsen Papers, Volume 2, Life History #1.
35. The Western Producer, August 25, 1938.
36. SAB, Violet McNaughton Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Violet McNaughton, September 14, 1943.
37. The Western Producer, December 9, 1937.
38. The Western Producer, November 3, 1938.
39. The Western Producer, December 9, 1937.
40. Dorise Nielsen, "Twelve Years Homesteading", The Star Weekly, August 31, 1940.
41. The Western Producer, March 11, 1937.
42. Beatrice Farnsworth, Aleksandra Kollontai (1980), p. 15.
43. Ibid., p. 8.
44. Ibid., p. 19.
45. Ibid., p. xii.
46. The Western Producer, July 29, 1937.

CHAPTER FIVE

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, 1940-1945

On July 18th, 1939, Dorise Nielsen was chosen United Progressive candidate for North Battleford from among three candidates on the first ballot. There were seventy-one delegates present.¹ Nielsen did not expect to win, but she fought a hard campaign in a constituency that covered an enormous area, and she defeated her only opponent, the incumbent Liberal, Cameron McIntosh, by 2,600 votes. The campaign had cost the United Progressives \$741.68.² When she received the news of her victory, Nielsen's husband was proud, but she was too exhausted to care.³

The details of Nielsen's political apprenticeship are sketchy. According to her election brochure in 1940, she had taken a minor part in the campaign to support her constituency's Farmer Labour candidate in the 1930 federal election, and had made her maiden political speech in support of the CCF candidate in the federal election of 1935. In 1937 and again in 1938, she had been elected vice-president of the CCF for the Meadow Lake Constituency, and member of the CCF Provincial Council. In the same period she had been involved in organizing women's clubs for the CCF.⁴ Probably Nielsen had gained valuable experience campaigning for Bob Paul, who had run as Meadow Lake's CCF candidate in the 1938 provincial election. She had also been involved in the formation of the United

Progressive Movement for the federal constituency of North Battleford in the fall of 1938, which had led to her expulsion from the annual convention of the Saskatchewan CCF in July, 1939,⁵ as well as to her nomination a week later.

Why the delegates chose Nielsen over two other possible United Progressive candidates is a matter of speculation. She was a talented speaker and an attractive person. A neighbour, who met Nielsen when she was first married, and knew her throughout this period, describes her as "tall and stately, beautiful, dignified and poised. She had class, she had charisma....she knew how to meet the public".⁶ She had already had considerable campaign experience in the 1938 provincial election, so she was well known. She had shared the experience of poverty with many constituents. They probably trusted her, many believing she was really CCF, despite her expulsion,⁷ and just as importantly, they thought she could be a winner.

When Nielsen went to Ottawa for the first session in May, 1940, she was the only woman in Parliament and consequently attracted a lot of attention, all of it favorable. Journalists were impressed with her sophistication and her calmness, despite a hectic schedule. She was obviously not the country bumpkin they had expected. One writer commented:

She hasn't the impetuous zeal of Agnes Macphail, but she has a calm assurance that fits her into the Ottawa

scene as neatly as if she had always been there.⁸

She was pictured as a heroine of the impoverished west - a woman who had endured much hardship herself, and who had come to Ottawa to represent people who had been neglected by the government. This image was true, and was useful, as well. Nielsen used her interviews with journalists to describe the conditions in Northern Saskatchewan that had resulted in her election by dissatisfied people.

It is difficult to know how long this honeymoon with the press lasted. In December, 1940, The Toronto Star gave a long and glowing account of a speech on civil rights that she delivered to a crowd of eight thousand at Maple Leaf Gardens,⁹ but in March, 1941, she was under attack by The Globe and Mail as a communist sympathizer.¹⁰ A few months later, the member of parliament for the Battlefords, making his first speech as a Liberal backbencher, used his time to condemn Nielsen for stirring up dissent in time of war and quoted an editorial comment from The Windsor Daily Star that Nielsen "in her anxiety to champion the cause of democracy...is apt to become a shield for the communists, nazis, fascists, and other subversive elements within our midst..."¹¹ Still she continued to be popular enough among many CCF supporters in Saskatchewan at least until January, 1942, when George Williams, the CCF leader there cautioned M.J. Coldwell, the national CCF leader, not to criticize Mrs. Nielsen in a province wide broadcast.¹²

The platform on which Nielsen was elected reflected the policies of the members of Social Credit, the CCF and the CPC who had combined their efforts in North Battleford. It advocated the maintenance of fundamental freedoms, despite the war, the control of profits, the introduction of social security measures such as unemployment insurance and old age pensions at sixty, the "socialization of those industries necessary to a national planned economy", the issuing and control of currency "in terms of people's needs", and the holding of a referendum - should conscription for overseas service become necessary, as well as a number of policies designed to increase and stabilize farm income.¹³

Nielsen pursued many of the policies outlined in her platform energetically and courageously while in parliament, but they were not her only agenda. As a covert member of the communist party, and the only communist member of parliament until Fred Rose's election in a by-election August 9, 1943, she played an important role in presenting the party's message to the Canadian public through parliament and more directly at meetings throughout the country.

In some respects the party's agenda was similar to the platform on which Nielsen had been elected except that acting on a directive from Comintern dated September 18, 1939, the CPC had declared itself against Canada's

of the federal cabinet on behalf of western Canada's small farmers, who believed that government policy favored large farmers. Among the delegation's demands were \$1.25 per bushel for wheat, a new quota system, crop insurance and release of the internees.³⁴ On reflection, Nielsen characterized these efforts as "insufficient to impress the government" but a factor in activating members of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool to collect a petition and lead a massive delegation to Ottawa in the spring of 1942.³⁵ Nielsen participated in organizing regional farm conferences in Saskatchewan until at least the end of 1942.³⁶ These efforts were deeply resented by the CCF which saw them as a communist attempt to undermine their support.³⁷

By the spring of 1942, with communists now in support of the war, Nielsen was heavily involved in campaigning for a "yes" vote in the conscription plebiscite that took place that April, as well as campaigning in support of opening a second front in Europe.

While it showed her loyalty to the party, Nielsen's ardour in supporting the war effort was as disturbing to some people as her previous lack of support had been to others. She no doubt lost friends in the CCF when she called on them to stop asking for the conscription of wealth in the interests of a united war effort³⁸ and in her constituency, she found "a considerable number opposed

conscription of manpower for home service and, along with eight CCF members, she opposed the war appropriations bill on the grounds that it did not conform with the principle of conscripting wealth for the war effort.¹⁸

She expressed her concern that urgent domestic problems such as better health care, and relief of poverty were being neglected on account of the war effort, that there should be no conscription without a plebiscite first, and that the burden of taxation to pay for the war was being borne by the poor while wealthy industrialists were profiteering.¹⁹ Although she never said directly that Canada should withdraw from the war, she used all the ammunition she could muster to show that domestic needs were urgent. She drew on her own experience of isolation, poverty, and poor medical care as well as that of her neighbours' and constituents'. She also made good use of studies of income, nutrition and health that had been done in the late 1930's and early 1940's.²⁰ For example, she compared Canada's 60,000 deaths in World War I to 103,000 infant and maternal deaths in the four year period 1931-1935 and called the mothers who died, "Canadian heroes unwept, unhonoured, unsung".²¹ She compared the new war memorial in Ottawa to the "living monuments to the last war", men "all in rags and tatters...a living testimony to the ingratitude of Canada".²²

Nielsen fought a losing battle in the early years of

the war as the government continued to cut expenditures on health and welfare. Then, largely on account of labour shortages, the federal government became more and more involved in social spending in areas such as day care and low rental housing for workers in war industries.²³

Although the CPC changed its stand against the war when Hitler attacked the USSR on June 22, 1941, it took another year to secure the release of communist internees, and two more years for the party to regain its legal status as the Labor Progressive Party. The reason for these delays was probably Mackenzie King's acquiescence to the Liberal party's Quebec wing, which, until his death in November, 1941, was led by Minister of Justice, Ernest Lapointe, and then by his successor as justice minister, Louis St. Laurent.²⁴

Fighting the Defense of Canada Regulations, which had outlawed the party and allowed the arrest of its members or suspected members, had moved to the top of Nielsen's political agenda by the fall of 1940. Throughout that summer and into the fall, arrests and internments took place. In the spring of 1941, the Minister of Justice, Ernest Lapointe, told the House of Commons that 870 people had been interned.²⁵ In February 1941, publication of the Canadian Tribune was banned for a three week period. A pamphlet containing Nielsen's speech opposing the budget had been seized by the RCMP who thought it was subversive, but after they had examined it, they decided not to

proceed.²⁶ In the House, Nielsen was warned by Lapointe that the RCMP had a file on her, which, unfortunately he could not disclose except to say that she kept "very bad company indeed".²⁷

Nielsen, though living on dangerous ground, fought back all the way. Time Magazine characterized the exchanges between Lapointe and Nielsen as "the hottest sessions in recent history".²⁸ To Lapointe's accusations, Nielsen replied that she was an independent member with no connection to the communist party. She believed that people should not be "branded" for opposing the government or for keeping bad company. She added that the Prime Minister, who had visited Germany where he had conversations with Hitler, would be very indignant, "if I or anyone else were to insinuate that he was a fascist".²⁹

Apart from speaking out in the House, Nielsen addressed a series of cross country meetings on civil liberties, and helped to organize the lobbying efforts of a delegation of wives and children of internees who came to Ottawa in March, 1941. Norman Penner, the son of an interned Winnipeg city councillor, remembers her help on that occasion, and also her assistance in his preparation of a pamphlet on the subject, "They Fought for Labour - Now Interned", published in April 1942.³⁰

Despite the important role she played in voicing the

priorities of her party, Nielsen continued to represent the particular interests of her constituency by speaking out on relief and farm policy. She called for higher wheat prices, a moratorium on farm debt, and a special policy geared to the needs of small farmers. She pointed out, for example, that a federal bonus of \$4.00 an acre for land that was idle, might benefit large farmers, but small farmers had too little land to take advantage of it.³¹

There is evidence, however, that Nielsen's efforts to start a new communist-led farm protest movement were probably futile. The time seemed ripe when Nielsen took office in the spring of 1940: the price of wheat was only \$.70 a bushel, and there was still fear of crop failure in her area on account of inadequate rainfall.³² Since 1937, the last year of widespread drought, there had been an increasing wheat surplus which the war initially exacerbated by cutting off some European markets. The "wheat crisis" actually did not begin to improve until after the middle of 1941.³³

In the fall of 1940, some Saskatchewan communists, led by Nielsen, organized a series of "Farm Emergency Conferences" in Saskatchewan, and launched a newspaper, The Western Farmer which continued publication biweekly for the next two years. In the summer of 1941, after another series of farm conferences, Nielsen accompanied a delegation of farmers to Ottawa to submit a brief to the wheat committee

of the federal cabinet on behalf of western Canada's small farmers, who believed that government policy favored large farmers. Among the delegation's demands were \$1.25 per bushel for wheat, a new quota system, crop insurance and release of the internees.³⁴ On reflection, Nielsen characterized these efforts as "insufficient to impress the government" but a factor in activating members of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool to collect a petition and lead a massive delegation to Ottawa in the spring of 1942.³⁵ Nielsen participated in organizing regional farm conferences in Saskatchewan until at least the end of 1942.³⁶ These efforts were deeply resented by the CCF which saw them as a communist attempt to undermine their support.³⁷

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to conscription".³⁹

Despite the dramatic change in her stand on the war, it would be a mistake to view Nielsen as a politician who simply changed her own priorities in order to toe the party line. For her, her priority of reforming the social and economic system was synonymous with the party line: the Soviet Union was the only model of the new society; if it fell, the cause of socialism would fall too. Thus supporting an all out war effort, including conscription, was vital to social and economic reform. In the short term also, the massive mobilization of labour required for the war effort, seemed to offer new opportunities for a more just society. Nielsen urged the government to include labour representatives on production planning committees,⁴⁰ she supported workers in their demands for collective bargaining rights,⁴¹ and women workers on equal pay.

The years in parliament were demanding ones for Nielsen and comprise the height of her political activity. In parliament, she led the campaign to release communist internees and then to lift the ban on the CPC,⁴² and, with other progressives, supported measures such as health insurance, aid for Jewish refugees,⁴³ and full citizenship rights for native people,⁴⁴ and for Japanese Canadians.⁴⁵ She took a particular interest in the government's farm policy and in the possibilities of

economic diversification on the prairies.⁴⁶ She received an extraordinary amount of mail⁴⁷ and as the only woman in the House for a year, and after that as one of two women, she often raised issues pertaining to women.⁴⁸ She was a member of three standing committees on railways, agriculture and natural resources, and of the Special Committee to Study the Problems of Reconstruction and Re-establishment set up in February, 1943.

On the whole, her numerous parliamentary speeches are well-informed, well-composed and apparently, very well delivered. According to one journalist:

Mrs. Nielsen has an excellent speaking voice, low-pitched, clear and forceful. She loves heckling. She can't be shouted down, she can't be thrown off her course, she can't be upset. In action she's the equal of three ordinary men or four cabinet ministers.⁴⁹

She also spoke many times at public meetings of labour and farm groups, and at campaign rallies during elections and by-elections.⁵⁰

She managed much of this public activity at a time when her family life was also very demanding. Her marriage ended by her own choice when she went to Ottawa in 1940.⁵¹ Apparently the split did not come because of political differences. Nielsen's daughter Christine remembers that her father sometimes went to political meetings with her mother, and that he was very proud and excited when she was elected.⁵² Pete Nielsen was a member of the CCF, and a supporter of the Unity Movement,

though he did not join the CPC. Many years later, Dorise Nielsen explained that if it had not been for her involvement in politics in the late thirties, she probably would have left her husband sooner. She said that he had become an alcoholic during World War I, but she had not realized his problem when she married him:

...if I'd not been persuaded to remain in Norbury and run in the election, I would have left your father right as soon as the war started, to get a war-time job of some sort for wages were high right then. By that time your father was so far gone that it had been obvious to me and to others that he was no longer capable of earning a living.⁵³

She went on to explain that she had never told the children about his alcoholism because she had not wanted them to be ashamed of their father.⁵⁴ The decision to leave her husband was not an easy one. She experienced her first attack of arthritis "on the farm when I was very distraught making up my mind to leave my husband..."⁵⁵

She intended to take the children with her to Ottawa, but after trying that in the summer of 1940, she took them home to board with a neighbouring farm family. Until the fall of 1943 when the three children were finally settled into relatively stable situations in Winnipeg, there were many changes in their living arrangements and many upsets. Nielsen made all the arrangements, paid the costs, visited the children whenever she could, shopped with them, and planned holidays, but her absence caused anguish and long term regrets and problems for all the children and for

Nielsen, too. She missed the children very much, especially Johnny, the youngest, who was only five when she was elected. In 1941, she told her friend, Heidi Vockeroth,⁵⁶ "Sometimes I feel that I can't go on without those children of mine - but - that's my little sacrifice I guess and it's not so little either".⁵⁷ In 1944, after telling Heidi that she finally had a small one-room apartment to herself, with lots of hot water, and so close to Parliament that she could go home for supper, Nielsen said, "even so, it's a lonely life, and I have no child with me". By then, she felt out of touch with her children, as if she hardly knew them anymore.⁵⁸

Nielsen's energetic persistence in the public sphere despite the many problems that faced her as a communist, as a first-term member of parliament, and as a single parent involved in a very time-consuming, exhausting career, requires some explanation. Did she receive practical support or moral support from anyone? Did she think she was playing an important role in advancing the causes she believed in? Did she enjoy some aspects of the political life, in spite of the sacrifices it required of her?

I believe that there were some rewards for her, and some sources of support for her work, but that the main well-spring of her strength and activity was her ideology. As I have said before she later characterized herself as unsuited to political work, and several letters written in

the forties mention her distaste for the dull "merry-go-round" in the House of Commons. Often she spoke to an almost empty house.⁵⁹ Other times she grew tired of listening to "verbal spitballs" being thrown across the floor.⁶⁰ She missed her friends and she grew tired of being on her best behaviour, watching every "damn".⁶¹ Obviously, the lady-like behaviour expected of a female member of parliament was another sometimes painful duty.

Still, her life in parliament was not entirely a wasteland. Even though she had refused to caucus with the CCF⁶² and she was apparently not taken seriously by many Members of Parliament sent to Ottawa by the "cracker barrel vote",⁶³ she had the respect and friendship of some members. It is probable that most members did not know with certainty that she was a communist. Paul Martin who remembers Nielsen as "one of the best speakers in the Commons at the time", says that some members thought she was "far to the left", but he was not sure "how far she really intended to pursue her political convictions".⁶⁴ M.J. Coldwell and T.C. Douglas soon believed that she was a committed communist⁶⁵ but still they spoke out in her defence when she was harassed by the RCMP⁶⁶ and supported her on some issues, such as making family allowance cheques payable to the mother.⁶⁷ Although it is difficult to know with any certainty, it seems that her closest colleagues in the house were Victor Quelch, Joe Noweworthy

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and Sandy Nicholson.⁶⁸

A source of practical help with her correspondence, and possibly an advisor on other matters, was Nielsen's secretary, Lilla Bell, whom she had inherited from Agnes Macphail.⁶⁹ Macphail, herself, liked Nielsen personally, and campaigned with her in a Saskatoon by-election in the summer of 1940, but she deplored her apparent communist sympathies, and it is unlikely that there was any further connection between the two women.⁷⁰ There is also no indication that she had any network of women friends in either the CCF or the Communist Party in Ottawa.⁷¹ Still Nielsen may have received some practical help in research and information gathering for her speeches from sympathetic civil servants.

The party, itself, was illegal from 1940 to 1943, but it was nonetheless active and probably provided Nielsen with an important source of direction, practical help, and inspiration. From June 1940 until the fall of 1942 the leadership of the party was underground. Tim Buck, Sam Carr and Charles Sims had fled to New York where they remained for a year. Directing operations in Canada were Stewart Smith, Leslie Morris, and Stanley Ryerson who established headquarters in Montreal. During the summer of 1940, a young woman, Louise Harvey, served as liason between Nielsen and the executive in Montreal.⁷² By the

spring of 1941, Nielsen was attending regular secret meetings with the executive in Toronto.⁷³

Another contact within the party was Albert MacLeod.⁷⁴ MacLeod, like Nielsen, had become a major figure in the party during its united front period. He and his wife had joined the party in Cape Breton where he had been working as secretary of a YMCA. From 1935 to 1939 he was the chairman of the Canadian Congress Against War and Fascism, an important communist front organization in that period.⁷⁵ At the time of Nielsen's election he was editor of The Canadian Tribune. In 1943 he resigned in order to run provincially in Ontario where he was an MPP from 1943 until 1952. Like Nielsen, the MacLeods were not openly party members until the formation of the LPP in 1943. Her relationship with MacLeod was probably important to Nielsen. One party member has the impression that MacLeod was Nielsen's mentor.⁷⁶ Certainly they became friends and she respected his advice. It is possible that his longer experience in public life was particularly useful to Nielsen when she was beginning her term in parliament.

Despite all the possible support networks I have described, the fact remains that Nielsen was more isolated than other members of parliament; she had no party caucus; and according to notes she made much later, she was "quite alone" with "no contact in Ottawa to help or advise" her.

She was also exhausted much of the time from an enormous workload.⁷⁷ What sustained her, I believe, was her personal philosophy and her belief in the party. Personally she believed very strongly that people should have "guts" and should act on their beliefs. Problems should be tackled, not avoided. It is better to "do something desperate, or even rash" than to drift: "drifting is dreadful and kills a woman by degrees", she advised her friend Heidi who was having difficulty making a decision.⁷⁸

Nielsen saw the party as composed of people whose courage and wisdom was exceptional, people who did not drift, but acted on their convictions. She described the founding convention of the LPP in 1943 to Violet McNaughton: "I find myself in most resolute company and among kindred spirits....I find among these people a much higher calibre, than anything I ever found in the CCF".⁷⁹ Of course, Nielsen had been in this "resolute company" before 1943, but she had not told McNaughton. Her confidence in the party's wisdom may have been slightly shaken when she was instructed to join the party openly in 1943, and when, after she lost the election in 1945, she was ordered to go to Toronto to work in the National Party Office;⁸⁰ however, she continued to have great respect and fondness for the party's leaders, particularly Tim Buck, Albert MacLeod, Stanley Ryerson, Becky Buhay, and

possibly others, for many years.

Nielsen's confidence in the party was based partly on the calibre of its leadership, but, more, I think, on her belief that the party truly represented the interests of the underdogs in Canadian society, and in the world as a whole. This belief was shared, of course, by many other Canadians who had experienced the depression, and who wanted radical change. Somehow, the evidence that the party actually toed the Moscow line on the war, on the timing of socialist change, and on its relationship to the CCF, was not an issue then among members who were deeply engaged in the struggle to organize unions, free internees, and fight Hitler. It was possible to believe that the party was on the leading edge of social change even when it opposed immediate socialization of the Canadian economy and supported a coalition with the Liberals, as it did in 1945, for the party was growing, and the post-war period promised a new world of a permanent alliance between the western powers and the USSR, and a Canada that might move towards socialism under Liberal leadership if the plans for reconstruction were realized.

Nielsen's belief in the party was probably nurtured by her round of speaking tours. During her parliamentary career and afterwards in her work for the party, she addressed hundreds of meetings of largely working class audiences. Some of these meetings attracted thousands of

people, and Nielsen was confident they had not come "just to see what kind of hat the only woman M.P. wore".⁸¹

This work encouraged Nielsen: she identified with these people, sympathized with their problems and admired their courage under adversity.⁸² Those who heard her speak always mention how gifted she was at holding her audience, how she emphasized the human, practical issues, not Marxist theory.

She may have been a valuable populizer of the party's message not only because of her talents on the platform, but also because identifying with people and their problems was the essence of communism for her. William Kashtan, a colleague of Nielsen's who later became party chairman, has described Nielsen as a woman who "lived by emotions rather than knowledge", and has attributed her "populist approach" to her own pre-disposition, her lack of theoretical development, and the populist traditions of western Canada.⁸³ Possibly his assessment says as much about his own values and those of the party as it does about Nielsen: the belief that knowledge and theoretical development were priorities and that emotions should be subject to them was common in the party and was subscribed to by Nielsen, herself, in many ways. At the same time, most members came to the party on account of a deep sense of injustice and a need for kindred spirits, as well as a thirst for knowledge. Nielsen's speeches were successful because they

appealed to both aspects - the emotional and the cerebral, and they were not just manipulative stunts, they were expressions of a woman whose commitment to the party was both emotional and intellectual.

Endnotes

1. "Mrs. Nielsen Named United Progressive in North Battleford", The Star Phoenix, July 19, 1939, p. 3.
2. Elizabeth Smillie, "Dorise Nielsen, Prairie Populist and Feminist", unpublished honours thesis in Canadian Studies, Trent University, 1981, p. 43.
3. Taped interview, Christine Nielsen to Georgina Taylor, July, 1987.
4. Sally Nielsen Carter Private Papers, Brochure: "Unity Means Victory", 1940.
5. Regina Leader Post, July 14, 1939. Five of six delegates from Meadow Lake were unseated for continuing to support the United Progressive Movement.
6. SAB, taped interview with Eline Morrow by Georgina Taylor.
7. National Archives, Dorise Nielsen Papers, Volume 2, letter to "Dear friends" from Bob Paul.
8. Jessie MacTaggart, "Ready to Up and at 'E for West, says Woman M.P.", Toronto Daily Star, May 15, 1940. See also The Ottawa Citizen, May 10, 1940, The Star Weekly, August 31, 1940 and Chatelaine, June, 1940.
9. Toronto Star, December 7, 1940.
10. Globe and Mail, March 5, 1941, p. 3.
11. House of Commons Debates, May 5, 1941, pp. 2567-2571.
12. SAB, CCF Papers, Williams to Coldwell, January 5, 1942.
13. Sally Nielsen Carter Private Papers, "Unity Means Victory", election brochure of the United Progressive Movement, Mildred, Saskatchewan, 1940.
14. Norman Penner, Canadian Communism, The Stalin Years and Beyond (1988).
15. Ibid., p. 165.
16. Ibid., pp. 170-171.
17. Ibid., p. 175.
18. House of Commons Debates, June 20, July 3, 1940.

19. See House of Commons Debates, Nineteenth Parliament, First Session, pp. 59-61, pp. 519-21, pp. 773-75, pp. 946-47, pp. 1260-1264.
20. Dennis Guest, in The Emergence of Social Security in Canada, comments on these studies as being "the strongest arguments in favour of family allowances" (p. 129). Apparently Canada had the highest infant mortality rate of any white country in the British Empire, and even during the war, with full employment, only 43.7% of families of wage earners had sufficient income to guarantee themselves a satisfactory, nutritional diet (taken from Dorothy Stepler, "Family Allowances for Canada", Behind the Headlines, 3, No. 2 (1945), p. 2.
21. House of Commons Debates, June 4th, 1940, pp. 519-21.
22. House of Commons Debates, May 20, 1940, p. 60.
23. Guest, op.cit., p. 105.
24. Penner, op.cit., p. 185.
25. House of Commons Debates, March 4, 1941, pp. 1214-1217.
26. Ibid., pp. 1214-1217.
27. Ibid., pp. 1214-1217.
28. Time, March 17, 1941, p. 36.
29. House of Commons Debates, March 5, 1941, p. 1250.
30. Interview with Norman Penner, May 25, 1988.
31. House of Commons Debates, April 30, 1941, pp. 2440-45.
32. House of Commons Debates, June 4, 1940, pp. 519-521.
33. Edgar Innis, Canada, a Political and Social History (1963), p. 490.
34. The Canadian Tribune, August 23, 1941, p. 41.
35. The Western Farmer, March 18, 1942.
36. The Canadian Tribune, November 1, 1942.
37. National Archives, Coldwell Papers, Coldwell to Dorise Nielsen, June 15, 1945.

38. House of Commons Debates, February 10, 1942, pp. 460-67.
39. House of Commons Debates, July 18, 1942, p. 3462.
40. House of Commons Debates, November 14, 1941, pp. 4408-12.
41. See The Canadian Tribune, August 23, 1941, p. 1.
42. House of Commons Debates, July 15, 1943, pp. 4845-52.
43. Ibid., July 1, 1943, p. 4233.
44. Ibid., July 23, 1943, pp. 5311-14.
45. Ibid., July 17, 1944, pp. 4927-4930. Nielsen spoke with the CCF in support of Japanese voting rights. She did not comment on the internment of Japanese-Canadians in B.C., but said that discrimination against Japanese Canadians was racist and pre-dated the war.
46. Ibid., June 15, 1943, pp. 3672-75. She discussed the possibilities of using wheat to make industrial alcohol and synthetic rubber.
47. National Archives, Heidi Vockeroth papers, Dorise Nielsen to Heidi Vockeroth, dated Mon. even. in the chamber", probably spring, 1941: "I'm snowed under with work - letters coming in by the hundreds".
48. House of Commons Debates, April 12, 1943, p. 2080. She asks that the work of farm women be recognized in the tax system.
49. A.F. Cross, "Parliamentary Personalities", Canadian Business, April, 1945, p. 78.
50. In August, 1940, she spoke in support of Agnes Macphail who lost her bid for a federal seat in Saskatoon. See Margaret Stewart and Doris French, Ask no Quarter, pp. 259-260. In May, 1941, she supported Albert MacLeod in Edmonton. He lost to Cora Casselman, who became the fourth woman to win a federal seat in Canada. Nielsen also supported William Kardash's successful campaign in the Manitoba election, April, 1941 and Tom McEwen's campaign in the Yukon in the federal election of 1945. She was particularly active during the 1944 elections in Saskatchewan and the 1945 federal election. She was involved in making radio broadcasts for the party locally in Saskatchewan (see the Canadian Tribune, April 15, 1944, p. 4) and nationally on the CBC (the Canadian Tribune, May 19, 1945, p. 7).

51. Taped interview, Christine Nielsen to Georgina Taylor, July, 1987.
52. Ibid., July, 1987.
53. National Archives, Christine Nielsen Wong Papers, letter from Dorise Nielsen to Sally Nielsen, January 24, 1978.
54. The children do not remember any violent or erratic behaviour that one would expect from an alcoholic, but Nielsen may have drunk excessively when he was away from home. They have happy memories of their father, and are inclined to see their parents as incompatible for other reasons.
55. National Archives, Louise Harvey Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Louise Harvey, August 30, 1964.
56. Heidi Vockeroth had moved to Nielsen's area with her children in 1938 and taught in Tinson School, which the Nielsen children attended. She and Dorise became close friends and corresponded for many years. Although it is rather difficult to judge from only one side of the correspondence, it seems that the two women shared similar political views.
57. National Archives, Heidi Vockeroth Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Heidi Vockeroth, Monday, Evening, In the Chamber, 9:30 pm, probably spring, 1941.
58. Ibid., letter from Dorise Nielsen to Heidi Vockeroth, In the Chamber, Friday night, probably spring of 1944.
59. Ibid., Dorise Neilsen to Heidi Vockeroth, Feb. 8, 1943 and March 2, 1942.
60. Ibid., Spring of 1944.
61. Ibid., March 2, 1942.
62. T.C. Douglas to Elizabeth Smillie, November 18, 1980. (In 1940 the CCF caucus consisted of eight members. It increased to nine with the election of Joe Noseworthy in 1942.)
63. A.F. Cross, "Parliamentary Personalities", Canadian Business, April 1945, p. 15.
64. Paul Martin to author, August 1988.
65. T.C. Douglas to Elizabeth Smillie, November 18, 1980.

66. House of Commons Debates, February 27, 1941, Coldwell, pp. 1069-70 and T.C. Douglas, March 3, 1941, pp. 1188-1191.
67. House of Commons Debates, August 1, 1944, Coldwell, Knowles, p. 5749. Cora Casselman, on the other hand, said that fathers were as trustworthy as mothers, p. 5750.
68. Victor Quelch was a farmer and a Social Credit Member of Parliament from Alberta who had first been elected in 1935. He supported Nielsen on the internment issue. He and his wife took a cottage with Nielsen and her children in the summer of 1943 or 1944. Sandy Nicholson was a United Church minister from Saskatchewan who was first elected (CCF) in 1940. He and his wife visited Nielsen in China and urged her to tape her memories, but she refused, saying she had done nothing of importance (PAC, Nicholson papers, September 4, 1975). Nicholson kept his correspondence with Nielsen and deposited it in the National Archives after her death. Joe Noseworthy (CCF) defeated Arthur Meighen in a by-election in Toronto in 1942. Nielsen describes him as her friend in a letter to Heidi Vockeroth, February 8, 1943.
69. Coldwell says that Nielsen "was very ably served and advised" by her. National Archives, M.J. Coldwell Papers, Memoirs, No. 3, p. 4.
70. Margaret Stewart and Doris French, Ask No Quarter, p. 260.
71. Marjory Mann of the CCF, who lived in Ottawa then, remembers meeting Nielsen, but not getting to know her well, because she was "rumored to be pro-Communist", and "we were busy trying to keep our skirts clean". Kathleen Repka, who joined the party in Ottawa in 1943, was not aware that Nielsen was a communist until both she and Nielsen went to work for the party in Toronto in 1946. Interview with Marjory Mann, July 1988, and with Kathleen Repka, June 1989.
72. National Archives, Louise Harvey Papers, Louise Harvey to Christine Nielsen, January 1981.
73. Bill Kardash, who had been elected to the Manitoba legislature, was present at some of these sessions. "These were policy discussions to clarify the positions that were to be advanced in our respective houses. The key question was to rally the forces of our country towards one aim - to bring about the victory over Hitler fascism". Letter to author from William Kardash, September 7, 1987.

74. Coldwell said, "It was not long...before I noted that she was visited by persons whom I knew to be communists and particularly Mr. A.A. MacLeod...undoubtedly a key figure (sic) in the Canadian Communist Party". National Archives, Coldwell Memoirs, No. 31.
75. Norman Penner, Canadian Communism, The Stalin Years and Beyond (1988), p. 116.
76. Stephen Endicott to Faith Johnston, September 16, 1987.
77. Taped interview of Christine Nielsen with Georgina Taylor, July 1987.
78. National Archives, Heidi Vockeroth Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Heidi Vockeroth, March, 1944.
79. SAB, Violet McNaughton Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Violet McNaughton, September 14, 1943.
80. In the first case, she thought she should consult her constituents first, in the second case, she wanted to remain in northern Saskatchewan and help to build the party there.
81. National Archives, Heidi Vockeroth Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Heidi Vockeroth, Spring 1941.
82. Ibid. See Nielsen's letter to Vockeroth, Spring 1941, in which she describes a meeting at Kirkland Lake in which the miners had been defeated after a long strike. "I felt better when I got to the platform and saw the faces of the men and women....they're wonderful. It is impossible to doubt the ultimate victory of Democracy when you are among the people".
83. Interview with Wm. Kashtan, August 24, 1988.

CHAPTER SIX

NEW WORLDS FOR WOMEN

There is no doubt that Dorise Nielsen deplored the subordinate status of women in Canadian society. Her view is evident in her writings, whether it was for private or public consumption, and in her speeches. In the House of Commons, her position on the status of women did not change, nor was it used only as a device to embarrass the government. She raised issues pertaining to women consistently in a variety of contexts. She raised the issue in her first speech in the House:

I find myself in the unique position of being the only woman member of this house, and I deeply regret it. It is a sad reflection upon us as a nation when, while over fifty per cent of our voters are women, we can have only one representative of our sex in this house....All through the ages we women unfortunately have been regarded as more or less the property of men. Because of that position we have been expected to be but the shadows of men, to reflect their ideas and to echo their sentiments....we have at last the courage to search our own hearts and to find that we have ideas and ideals peculiar to ourselves. To fail to give expression to these ideas is to deny our womanhood.¹

In reply to the speech from the throne in 1943, Nielsen took exception to the Prime Minister's remark that he hoped that in the future parliament would be more representative and went on to mention specifically including men who had returned from overseas. Why, Nielsen said, did he make no mention of women? They were also making important contributions to the war effort.²

On the death of J.S. Woodsworth, she paid tribute not

the total, and more votes than any communist candidate west of Manitoba. She wanted to return to her constituency and travel abroad, organizing for the party, but the party, believing that its growth would continue, tried to capitalize on her high profile by bringing her to Toronto as national legislative secretary of the LPP.³⁷ Her first national speaking tour in the post-war period, on the housing crisis, took place January to April, 1946. In the midst of this tour, the Gouzenko case was made public; Fred Rose, the only communist member of parliament was arrested, and a warrant was issued for the arrest of Sam Carr, the party's national organizational secretary.³⁸ With the image of the party tainted by this spy scandal, the usefulness of a public figure like Nielsen who was known to be a party member, obviously diminished. Her next major task was a fund-raising campaign to launch a daily edition of The Canadian Tribune. In 1947, Nielsen began writing for the new daily, and continued that work, when, after six months it reverted to a weekly. Most of her articles were related to mobilizing women around the issues of prices or peace, the current party strategies.³⁹

Meanwhile, Nielsen's place in the party hierarchy deteriorated. Although she was never a member of the party's small inner circle,⁴⁰ she had been elected a member of the National Executive or politburo in 1945. She soon resigned because she felt that her education in

jobs,⁹ she was also advancing ideas that had the support of her party and had long been seen by socialists as the key for the emancipation of women.

In the Commons her arguments for improving women's positions in the labour force were not radical - they were the same arguments that maternal feminists had made for many years. She assured members of parliament that given choices, most women would still choose to stay home and raise families, but they would be there by choice, not necessity, and would therefore be happier, better mothers. She pointed out that many women - who were spinsters or widows, or who supported disabled husbands needed good jobs and adequate wages. Probably she tempered her arguments to her audience, however, for in New Worlds for Women, a booklet she wrote in 1944, she clearly valued women who took their place in the paid labour force as vanguards of a new and better social order:

The going-out-to-work women will affect the life of the country most deeply, and they will create a change in the lives of all Canadian women.¹⁰

It was these women because of their own needs, who would assure that wage rates were maintained and community services for families, such as day nurseries, were set up.

In trying to place Nielsen's ideas about women in the context of her time, it is useful to compare them with the recommendations of the Sub-Committee on the Post-war Problems of Women.¹¹ The Sub-Committee, composed of ten

women from across Canada, representing predominantly middle-aged club women (Grace McInnis was an exception to this trend), was asked to make recommendations on all aspects of post-war problems relating to women.¹²

Unfortunately the committee's work was very rushed, but, nevertheless, its recommendations give us some indication of the ideas of a fairly progressive group of women on women's roles.¹³ In discussing the following recommendations it is well to remember that a major concern of all those dealing with the problems of reconstruction was the possibility of post-war unemployment.

The committee's recommendations included children's allowances, payable to the mother; morning nursery schools to be an integral part of the school system, freeing mothers for part-time jobs or other activities; government funding and standards for training domestic service workers, as well as their inclusion in unemployment insurance and workmen's compensation; a scheme to assist single women to settle on farms;¹⁴ the same retraining privileges to be offered to women war workers as to men "though dealing with occupations attractive to women or those in which employers like to hire women"; aid to farm women by means of rural electrification and assistance in establishing small businesses; and the right of married women to choose whatever type of employment they wish.

Nielsen singled out a number of the sub-committee's

recommendations to support in the House, quoting its report in the process.¹⁵ Like the sub-committee, she placed highest priority on the right of a woman, married or single, to choose her occupation, and to receive equal pay and opportunity for advancement; she also supported the expansion of day nurseries, the up-grading of domestic service,¹⁶ the institution of a children's allowance to be payable to the mother,¹⁷ and schemes to ease the work of farm women.¹⁸

In March, 1944, Nielsen wrote to a friend that she expected to have a busy two-week Easter break:

I shall have to spend the first few days in Toronto for discussions. Also during the recess I have to prepare a pamphlet on women's work after the war. I want to stay three days in Winnipeg with the children - then on to Regina. A mass meeting there - also a broadcast --- mass meeting at Moose Jaw....Then on my way back...up north at Sudbury for a meeting, and back to Toronto to speak to a large gathering of Jewish women. Talk about a busman's holiday.¹⁹

The pamphlet Nielsen mentioned probably turned out to be more work than she had expected. It became a 109 page booklet published by Progress Books in December, 1944. Although it focuses on women's work in the paid labour force, on the farm, in the home, and even in the volunteer sector, and has a special section on women in Quebec, it also covers a wide range of other topics traditionally of particular concern to women such as health care, education, housing, juvenile delinquency and recreational services. If not for the emphasis on the importance of unionization,

and the section "Housework New Style" which tentatively proposes the socialization of child care and housework, one would doubt the book had been written by a socialist, let alone a revolutionary socialist. Class conflict is nowhere in evidence, Mackenzie King is praised, and readers are urged to support a coalition government that will continue King's enlightened policies such as family allowances, government aid for housing, and support of the United Nations.²⁰

New Worlds for Women reflects the LPP election platform in the 1945 federal election in which it called for a Liberal-labour coalition. It was undoubtedly written in a very simple style for mass distribution in anticipation of that election, and it was probably written by Nielsen, with the help of some other communist women,²¹ because her high public profile would aid distribution. Unfortunately it is difficult to know how much attention the book received in 1944.

Today, New Worlds for Women provides evidence of the optimistic view, commonly held at the time, that wartime changes offered revolutionary opportunities for improvements in the status of women, and that the welfare state would soon emerge in Canada. In 1943 the Marsh Report, commissioned by the Committee on Post-War Reconstruction, had recommended a complete social security system to include children's allowances, comprehensive

health insurance, and a vast public investment program in housing and rural electrification.²² Nielsen's book is also a good summary of her ideas about women, if not about Mackenzie King. Although its tone is more conciliatory than her later articles in the Canadian Tribune, or her earlier letters to the Western Producer, New Worlds for Women deals in greater detail with Nielsen's continuing concerns about the welfare of women and children.

It is clear from New Worlds for Women, that Nielsen's vision of the new world differed in several important ways from that of the Sub-Committee on the Post-War Problems of Women. She criticized its statement that "the social progress of a country depends to a very large extent on the voluntary efforts of women", which in turn "depends largely on competent household workers".²³ This vision of middle and upper class women doing important tasks in the public sphere as volunteers while their maids kept house, was anathema to her socialist heart. First of all she identified "the servant problem" as being the employer's problem - for what woman who has other choices, wants to live in a house and yet be apart from the life of the family?²⁴ Her solution was a unionized "mini-maid" service, and community laundry and dining rooms.²⁵ And public service should be done by all people, not just the privileged, but in a policy-making sense only: the actual work in the public sphere should be done by trained, paid,

professionals.²⁶ Thus Nielsen hoped that much of the drudgery would be removed from homemaking, and its functions, including the raising of children would be shared by the community. She envisioned women being trained for jobs that they would expect to keep because child-rearing would occupy only a short interlude in a woman's life.²⁷

Although Nielsen is very careful not to offend those women who remain at home, her plans reflect the Marxist-Leninist view that domestic work should be socialized in order to free women for more important work in the public sphere. Nielsen seems to assume that it will be women who will continue most of the work in child care, housecleaning,²⁸ and in the lower echelon of health services.²⁹ She does recommend that both boys and girls should be educated for parenting, but it is clear that she expects that women will continue to assume the major responsibility in that area.³⁰

It is very easy for a modern feminist to criticize both programs for women's emancipation: both illustrate stereotypical thinking about women's roles which we now believe is a major impediment to equality; neither seems to recognize that equal pay legislation will not help the majority of women who work in female-dominated occupations such as nursing and office work.³¹ Nielsen's confidence in trained professionals taking over public service work is

just as problematic as the sub-committee's belief that middle and upper-class women should continue to devote their time to public service work: on the one hand, we know that professionalization of work has often caused the marginalization of women workers; on the other hand, we know that women's work will continue to be under-valued if they do it for nothing.

We have benefited from another generation of experience and thought on these issues and have not been subject to the wartime propaganda that probably served to reinforce sexual stereotypes.³² We should recognize that while both Nielsen and the sub-committee presented flawed solutions to women's problems, at least they pinpointed the areas that were perpetuating women's inferior status: inequalities in the paid labour force, and responsibility for housework and child care. Over forty years later we are still working on the same problems, and we still do not have the universal child care system recommended by the sub-committee and Nielsen.

In some respects Nielsen presents a program of reform that could benefit more women than the sub-committee's recommendations would. She has avoided the class bias that contributed to the committee's concern with increasing the availability of servants; she has focused on unionization as an important method of improving women's wages, and has urged that no woman should work "for pin money": all women

must demand wage rates that would allow them to live independently, otherwise all women's wages will remain low.³³ In addition, her proposal for socializing housework by removing many tasks from the home certainly had the potential to help more women than the sub-committee's proposals to increase the numbers of domestic servants.

In another respect, however, both Nielsen and the committee condemned their efforts to oblivion by trusting that their programs could be implemented without the massive efforts of women acting on their own behalf.³⁴ The subcommittee was instructed by Dr. James, the Chairman of the Committee on Post-War Reconstruction, to avoid publicity in its work and it did so. It did not contact national women's organizations until near the end of its work.²⁵ In the House of Commons, Nielsen congratulated Australian women who had held a national conference and produced a women's charter; she said that she wished "the women of Canada would see the wisdom of themselves doing something along the same line",³⁶ but in New Worlds for Women, she stated at the outset that "women must work together with men and vice versa to achieve those things we both need and desire for the family and the community".³⁷ Her emphasis throughout this work is that whatever was good for women would be good for men and children too. This emphasis is not surprising, for Nielsen clearly believed

that socialism was the key to a better life for everyone, and that women's lives could improve only through collective action with men, whether in unions, community groups, or government:

It is not then, a question of the 'liberation of women' with which we must deal. It is a question of changing life's conditions so that both men and women can contribute to the world's work more efficiently and live together more happily.³⁸

Endnotes

1. House of Commons Debates, May 20, 1940, p. 59.
2. House of Commons Debates, February 4, 1943, p. 147.
3. March 23, 1942, pp. 1508-1509.
4. House of Commons Debates, May 25, 1943, p. 3023.
5. Ruth Roach Pierson, They're Still Women After All, p. 115.
6. Ibid., p. 116.
7. House of Commons Debates, March 2, 1944, pp. 1086-87 and May 4, 1944, pp. 2628-2633. The issue of equal pay legislation received support from both the Conservatives and the CCF. Although the government maintained that the war labour board, which supervised the wage structure and arbitrated labour disputes, was faithful to the principle of equal pay, in many cases women continued to be paid less for doing the same work. Also, a National Labour Code that was discussed by federal and provincial governments was never agreed upon. See House of Commons Debates, May 4, 1944, and Ruth Roach Pierson, "They're Still Women After All, p. 117.
8. Joan Sangster, Dreams of Equality, p. 170: At the 1942 and 1944 Canadian Congress of Labour conventions resolutions on equal pay were widely supported.
9. House of Commons Debates, July 1, 1943, pp. 4235-4239, and May 4, 1944, pp. 2628-2633.
10. Dorise Nielsen, New Worlds for Women, p. 15.
11. Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "Pigeon-Holed and Forgotten", Histoire Sociale - Social History, May 1982, p. 240. The Sub-Committee had been appointed in January 1943 almost two years after the Committee on Reconstruction, composed of six men, had been set up to advise the government on post-war economic planning in order to avoid the type of post-war economic problems that had occurred after World War I. The committee quickly set up sub-committees on particular aspects of post-war planning, but only after continued pressure from women's groups did it to appoint the Sub-Committee on Women.
12. Ibid., p. 243.

13. A questionnaire distributed by the sub-committee to women working in war industries showed that many women at the time were more conservative than the sub-committee: many responded that while single women should have equality in the workforce, married women should not be allowed to work if their husbands had a comfortable position (*Ibid.*, p. 247). The sub-committee, on the other hand, recommended that all women, married or single, should have job choices.
14. The sub-committee was incorrect in its assumption that domestic service would continue to be a major employer of women in the post-war period. Also, it erred, as did other planners, in believing that agriculture would offer expanded employment opportunities in Canada.
15. House of Commons Debates, May 4, 1944, pp. 2630-2632. This is the only reference made in the House of Commons to the Sub-Committee's recommendations, although the government proposed children's allowances before the sub-committee's report was submitted.
16. House of Commons Debates, May 4, 1944, pp. 2630-2631.
17. House of Commons Debates, July 26, 1944, pp. 5399-5422. An amendment to make the family allowance payable to the mother was supported by the CCF (see House of Commons Debates, August 1, 1944, p. 5749) but was defeated. The act which was passed said that the allowance would be payable to a parent.
18. Dorise Nielsen, New Worlds for Women, pp. 39-43.
19. National Archives, Heidi Vockeroth Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Heidi Vockeroth, "In the Chamber, Friday night", Spring, 1944).
20. Dorise Nielsen, New Worlds for Women, p. 95.
21. In the foreward she acknowledges that her book "has been made possible only by the willing co-operation of several women, some of them with heavy home responsibilities", p. 7.
22. Dennis Guest, The Emergence of Social Security in Canada, 1980, pp. 113-114. Also in 1943, the Heagerty Report on health insurance and public health was made public and in 1944, the Curtis Report on Housing. Nielsen probably made use of these reports in preparing New Worlds for Women. At one point she quoted the Curtis Report, p. 53.

23. As quoted in New Worlds for Women, p. 76.
24. Ibid., p. 79.
25. Ibid., pp. 81-84.
26. Ibid., p. 76.
27. Ibid., pp. 64-65. She thought it "highly desirable" that mothers of pre-schoolers should work only part-time, however, otherwise their schedule would be too exhausting.
28. Dorise Nielsen, New Worlds for Woman, p. 82. "Why not low interest loans to enable a group of women to buy equipment and form themselves into a housecleaning business?".
29. Ibid., p. 86. She explains that a practical nurse might be trained to provide home care through national health insurance - providing "excellent vocations for girls with a taste for this kind of work..."
30. Ibid., p. 73. "Less domestic science (cooking and what-not) and more family management and child care should be in the curriculum for girls".
31. Ibid., pp. 31-33. Nielsen recognized the problems in these areas, but did not tell women to avoid these occupations. Instead she believed that the salaries of teachers and nurses must be raised, and that retail workers, office workers and domestic workers should unionize to improve their lot.
32. That the war reinforced sexual stereotyping in Canadian society is the thesis of Ruth Roach Pierson's, They're Still Women After all, The Second World War and Canadian Womenhood, 1986.
33. Dorise Nielsen, New Worlds for Women, p. 29.
34. There are other reasons, of course, why the government failed to implement the sub-committee's recommendations, including the conservatism of King and most of his cabinet towards women. See Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "Pigeon-Holed and Forgotten", p. 257.
35. Ibid., p. 254.
36. House of Commons Debates, May 4, 1944, p. 2631.
37. Dorise Nielsen, New Worlds for Women, p. 9.
38. Ibid., p. 11.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Legacy

Dorise Nielsen lost her seat to the CCF in the 1945 federal election because there were many factors working against her. The most important of them were probably the active opposition of the CCF, which at that time was at the height of its popularity, having won the Saskatchewan provincial election in 1944; and Nielsen's affiliation with the Labour Progressive Party, which was not only known to be communist, but made the tactical error (as far as many of Nielsen's constituents were concerned) of supporting a "Liberal-Labour coalition" in its 1945 campaign.¹ In addition the LPP fielded one hundred and one candidates in that election, spreading itself too thin, and consequently under-funding those constituencies that it had the best chance to win. This electoral loss did not mean the end of Nielsen's work in the party. She worked full time for the party, first as a national organizer, then as a journalist and columnist for The Canadian Tribune and director of the party's women's department, and finally as national secretary of the Canadian-Soviet Friendship Society. She remained a loyal party member even after she moved to China in 1957. She finally split with the party over the Sino-Soviet dispute in the early 1960's.

During the post-war period Nielsen was working for an

organization that was on the defensive because of the Cold War. The party's growth ended with the Gouzenko case in 1946, and although party members launched campaigns on a wide range of valid causes, they encountered increasing suspicion and hostility from the general public. The erosion of support was gradual; few core members left the party before 1956 - after all, enduring hostility was not new to them. It was Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, followed by the Soviet crackdown on Hungary in October, that caused many leading Canadian communists to question the Soviet experiment in socialism and the Canadian party's ability to act independently of Moscow.²

By this time, Nielsen was no longer a party functionary. She had left her last post as national secretary of the Canadian-Soviet Friendship Society after a dispute over the handling of funds in 1954, and had gone to England in 1955³ with her companion, Conroy Godefroy, hoping to find work and make a new life there, or go on to China. By February, 1956, they had given up on England on account of the climate and poor wages,⁴ had found the prospects of getting work in China dim, and were planning their return to Canada.⁵ On their return, they spent approximately a year in Canada, finally moving to China in the summer of 1957.⁶ There is no record of Nielsen's

reaction to the revelations of the Twentieth Congress or to the Hungarian Revolution, although she was in Canada while debate raged on these issues. It seems that her faith in the Soviet Union and Tim Buck's leadership remained firm. If so, her reaction was similar to most rank and file members who could not accept the "anti-Sovietism" of the critics and believed that the existence of the party required an end to such divisiveness. Certainly those who stayed in the party remember her as a loyal member while she was in Canada and were surprised by her later criticism of the party, attributing it to her susceptibility to Maoist propaganda.⁷

Nielsen's own account of her reasons for first leaving Canada and then for leaving the Canadian party differ somewhat. She says that she left party work in 1954 because she found "no joy or success in the work".⁸ She was disillusioned with the party but felt that she must be at fault, for "discussions with others in Toronto failed to bring (her) any relief". Later she went to China, hoping that seeing a successful revolution in action, and studying Marxist theory in greater depth would renew her commitment to socialism.⁹ After going through a traumatic rethinking of her position at the time of the Sino-Soviet split in 1960-61, she came to believe that the Canadian party had become corrupt or revisionist right after the war, but she had kept on working for it because she "didn't

know enough to get out".¹⁰ She felt that she had been one of those people who "have to be hit over the head before they wake up".¹¹

In the 1960's her own view, as one might expect, was that Marxists must retain their revolutionary strategy; only then could they offer correct leadership in the struggle against the forces of fascism and imperialism. Tim Buck's attempt to "slide into power through a parliamentary majority" had been "more Gilbert and Sullivan than Marx".¹² The party in Canada, rather than offering progressives correct leadership, had become a tiny group, "talking mainly to itself."¹³ For a while in the 1960's, Nielsen wrote her friends in Canada urging them to form a new Marxist party along Maoist lines. To the end of her life she was grateful to China for the opportunities she found there to study Marxism and to learn "to trust my own understanding, and realize that I was correct all those years ago to leave the party when I did".¹⁴

Altogether, in hindsight, Nielsen viewed her years of political activity in Canada, particularly the post-war years, as a failure. She regretted very much that her work had caused her to neglect her children, and that "like the lilies of the field", she had made no provision for her old age,¹⁵ but mainly she regretted wasting her energy working for a party that was unsuccessful, not because of the politics of the cold war, but because of its

ideological impurity. It is tempting to conclude that Nielsen turned from one type of dogmatism to another, first ardently toeing the CPC line, and next the Maoist line, and that an ideology and a party that seemed at first to offer her some form of truth and liberation, actually narrowed her vision and left her in the lurch economically. There is no doubt a lot of truth in such a conclusion, but it needs some explanation and several qualifications.

Over the years, did Nielsen's communist vision, whether pro-Soviet or Maoist, broaden or narrow her understanding of the world? I think on balance, that it broadened her understanding. There were some major blind spots, of course, but as far as their understanding of the dynamics of economic political situations in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and their critiques of American and European imperialism, Marxists were probably much better informed about world events than most of the Canadian population.

Even on women's issues, which never became a party priority, there was probably more discussion and information from party sources in the 1940's and 1950's than one would have encountered in other political parties. In her position as Chairman of the National Women's Commission of the party, Nielsen wrote a column in The Canadian Tribune (1948-1951). Although its main purpose was to mobilize women for party campaigns, the column also presented articles on the problems of women's

present status,¹⁷ and a series on the history of Canadian Women designed to mobilize women in support of peace and other party priorities by reminding them of what fighters their foremothers in the suffrage movement and the labour movement had been, and how women like Emily Stowe had sacrificed time and endured social disapproval for the causes they believed in.¹⁸ Nielsen's own copy of Engel's The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State is much marked and has obviously been carefully studied. She met communist women from around the world and was impressed by their history of participation in anti-fascist and revolutionary movements in the 1930's and 1940's.¹⁹ On a visit to Moscow in 1949, she was able to see impressive pioneering efforts in maternal and child care.²⁰ Thus, although Nielsen's allegiance to the party increasingly isolated her from exchanges and support from non-party women in Canada it enabled her to gain some understanding and inspiration from the activities of women abroad.

When one assesses the impact of her communist ideology and her party work on other areas of Nielsen's development and on the development of her children, one would probably conclude that the balance was negative. Again, it is difficult to speculate how her life would have developed had she not become committed to communist ideology and to the CPC. Would she have left her husband or stayed? Would she

have undertaken full-time work while raising children? Whatever she had done after settling in Saskatchewan, her life would not have been easy. It would, thus, be an over-simplification to attribute the problems of her children for example, solely to the demands of party work.

To look first at the positive side of the ledger, one of the attractions of party work for Nielsen, and historically for some other women on the left, has been the apparent opportunity to break from the narrow range of roles that patriarchal societies have approved for women, to do "men's work" in service of a noble cause.²¹

Nielsen "truly wanted to be a revolutionary and do something for the world...."²² In the thirties, the need for courageous action on both the domestic and the international scene was obvious. Nielsen's local party cell or club probably offered her the opportunity to participate in study and action on these urgent problems on an equal basis with men, and because of her abilities and dedication she was a valued comrade.

At this point, the party and its ideology helped Nielsen deal with her problems of isolation, poverty and discontent with her domestic role and helped her set an agenda for herself that increased her skills, broadened her horizons and gave her some satisfaction.

...in the early days up in the bush, I together with a few others put these theories (of Marx) into practice and carried out a most successful experiment.²³

Even after her move to Toronto, Nielsen may have found the party milieu encouraging in some respects, though intimidating in others. The work was demanding and seemingly endless, but there was usually a feeling of camaraderie. There were other women, who like Nielsen, had sought and won election, though at the municipal level: Helen Anderson Carlson in Hamilton, Elizabeth Morton, Edna Blais Ryerson and Hazel Wigdor in Toronto. Nielsen became close friends with Hazel Wigdor, as well as Virginia and Albert MacLeod, Kathleen Repka, and Mary Jennison, a party member and community service worker in Hamilton. Possibly she did not develop a close relationship with either of the upper echelon party women, Becky Buhay and Annie Buller, because of considerable age and personality differences, or because their long party experience and level of theoretical understanding made her feel insecure. She was fond of Bukay, the party's chief woman theorist.

The party may also have provided Nielsen with a milieu in which she could function without disapproval or loss of status as a separated woman who had several relationships with men.²⁴ Although Joan Sangster's work shows that the norm of sexual behaviour in the party was the bourgeois marriage and the double standard, it seems that in the party one was able to be somewhat more open about extra-marital affairs. Becky Buhay, for example, one of the most prominent women in the party, lived with Tom

McEwen for five years in the 1930's.²⁵

Stanley Ryerson has noted that in the party there was a certain cynicism about bourgeois morality that sometimes resulted in sexual opportunism.²⁶ Nielsen was neither an opportunist nor the victim of opportunists, but she came to believe that a sort of serial monogamy was probably the most natural and honest arrangement for most people, unless a couple had a lasting desire to stay together because of "interlocking intellects or interests".²⁷ Her own experience was that once love cooled, she resented the care and attention men demanded, and thought it best to make a clean break.²⁸ Although, after leaving her husband, she never expected to be economically dependent on a man, it seems that she was willing to play the domestic role, as long as it did not become too demanding, and as long as she was getting something from the relationship.

On the negative side of the ledger, it seems that Nielsen's experience in the Canadian party, after 1945, eroded her confidence in her own ability, and made her children's lives particularly difficult. Working for the party left little time for one's personal life. Everyone was expected to attend evening meetings or lectures, and, in the case of national organizers, there was travelling. Other writers have noted the heavy time commitment expected of party members. Tom McEwen, who became an organizer for the party in 1927, first on the prairies, and then

nationally, was a widower with four young children when he first became a full-time party worker. His salary was less than he had been earning as a blacksmith. He did not realize the degree of hardship his decision would impose on his children:

In making my decision to become a "professional revolutionary" I had placed the probabilities of neglect, sacrifice, and other extreme hardship and social opprobrium upon my young children, which no parent has any moral, ethical, or other right to do. The ensuing years gave full confirmation to that belated realization.²⁹

In Nielsen's case, the problems for her children had begun when she was elected to parliament in 1940. She was away from them so much that at vacation time the children felt they were "going on a visit with a stranger".³⁰ In the first few years the children were moved several times, as there were few people willing and able to take care of three children. They had some unhappy experiences that increased their feelings of being alone and defenceless. Although Christine and Sally spent several years with kind, caring party families in Winnipeg, Chris remembers that by then she had "the idea that people in the party (were) not so wonderful as Mum had built them up to be. There always seemed to be things going on that I didn't understand, shouldn't inquire about".³¹

In the fall of 1945, when Nielsen went to work for the party in Toronto, she tried to reestablish the family

there, but again there were absences on account of speaking tours, and evening work. Christine, who lived with her mother for a year and a half after the war, remembers her being overworked and exhausted most of the time. Probably as a result of the disruptions and insecurities in their lives, none of the children finished high school,³² and both girls soon sought love and security in relationships with men. Both married when they were young and became full-time mothers of large families.³³ They rejected their mother's lifestyle and resented the deprivations it imposed on them. Now, however, in middle age, having experienced the break-up of their own marriages, and their mother's death, they have been going through a long and painstaking re-assessment of their mother's life.³⁴

The youngest child, John, perhaps experienced even more problems than the girls. He was only five when his mother was elected. In 1943, at the age of eight he was settled in a boarding school in Winnipeg, and stayed there until 1947 when he came to Toronto. The move to Toronto was difficult for him and he dropped out of school. It is difficult to know the effect of his mother's career on his life because he is unwilling to talk about it.

This brief glimpse of one family's life in the party is at odds with the memories of another "red-diaper baby", Merrily Weisbord, daughter of Canadian communists in Montreal, who sees the party's legacy as positive:

When I was a child, people...surrounded me with affection and interest. I was at home in a hundred houses....I learned to have principles, to share, never to give up. I learned respect for people....I retain the hope I was given, that people can live together with dignity and decency, a hope I seem to share with others brought up by communist parents.³⁵

If the Nielsen children's lives had not been disrupted by moving to strange new places, and if they had been able to have uninterrupted times with at least one parent, they too may have been able to benefit from the generosity and ideals of most party people. Unfortunately, they did not always feel at home in the houses where they stayed; they missed their mother and father and the stability they had had on the farm before their mother's election.

Nielsen was concerned about the children,³⁶ but at this time in her life she put party work first. In the end she had regrets, for she felt she had failed to be either a good revolutionary or a good mother. Unfortunately she had set herself an impossible task: the demands of party work and raising children were not compatible.

The problem of her children and her worries and guilt concerning them were not the only problems Nielsen experienced in the party. Although she was an able person who worked devotedly at whatever she did, she was not able to find a place in the party that suited her. Probably the main reason for this was the unexpected decline of the party in the post-war period. When Nielsen was defeated in 1945, she still retained 2124 votes, thirteen percent of

the total, and more votes than any communist candidate west of Manitoba. She wanted to return to her constituency and travel abroad, organizing for the party, but the party, believing that its growth would continue, tried to capitalize on her high profile by bringing her to Toronto as national legislative secretary of the LPP.³⁷ Her first national speaking tour in the post-war period, on the housing crisis, took place January to April, 1946. In the midst of this tour, the Gouzenko case was made public; Fred Rose, the only communist member of parliament was arrested, and a warrant was issued for the arrest of Sam Carr, the party's national organizational secretary.³⁸ With the image of the party tainted by this spy scandal, the usefulness of a public figure like Nielsen who was known to be a party member, obviously diminished. Her next major task was a fund-raising campaign to launch a daily edition of The Canadian Tribune. In 1947, Nielsen began writing for the new daily, and continued that work, when, after six months it reverted to a weekly. Most of her articles were related to mobilizing women around the issues of prices or peace, the current party strategies.³⁹

Meanwhile, Nielsen's place in the party hierarchy deteriorated. Although she was never a member of the party's small inner circle,⁴⁰ she had been elected a member of the National Executive or politburo in 1945. She soon resigned because she felt that her education in

Marxism was inadequate to cope with the work:

When in Toronto I was unable to make any good contribution to the National Executive of the Party meetings because of my lack of theory. I had never attended any classes but relied on my own reading of Marxist classics.⁴¹

In 1946, Nielsen did attend a party summer school for three months, but she continued to feel her "lack of theory" until the 1960's when she pursued her studies in China. It is ironic that a woman who was viewed by most of her contemporaries as bright, and in many ways, exceptional, felt so inadequate in this respect. No doubt she was with a group of seasoned party members, some of whom had had the opportunity to study at the Lenin School in Moscow before the war, but one cannot help thinking that grasp of theory may have been used, possibly unconsciously, as a controlling mechanism by those in power. Nevertheless, for Nielsen this party emphasis on doctrine became important, and remained so.

From 1948-1951 Nielsen was the Chairman of the National Women's Commission of the party, in charge of mobilizing party women to support party campaigns, and of building a communist front organization called the Canadian Congress of Women, to mobilize Canadian women in support of the peace movement. As Joan Sangster has noted, the women's commission in the party had had little prestige or independence since the 1920's.⁴² In some ways, however, Nielsen enjoyed this assignment because it gave her the

opportunity to attend two international meetings of women and to communicate to Canadians her excitement about roles that women were playing, alongside men, in building socialist societies in eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China. On the other hand, it seems she found her task of mobilizing housewives less inspiring; she found it difficult to hide her own belief that women should have careers, although she knew, in the Canadian context, the difficulties a career and a family presented.⁴³

In 1951, Nielsen began to work full-time as the national secretary of the Canadian Soviet Friendship Society, an organization that had enjoyed broad support immediately after the war, but was, by then, organizing cultural events for a much smaller audience. This was another demotion for Nielsen, one that she accepted as a loyal party worker, but later resented.⁴⁴

It is difficult to know if Nielsen's final problems finding appropriate and satisfying work in the party, were to some extent gender-related. There were other problems certainly: the decline in the party's popularity after a period of rapid expansion, leaving it with "too many chiefs and not enough Indians",⁴⁵ and the continuing importance of the party's traditional constituencies - unions and ethnic organizations - in which Nielsen had no expertise or experience. Indirectly though, gender, as well as ethnicity, may have been related to her lack of confidence,

and her lack of options. Because of the party's emphasis on class solidarity, no women's caucus had emerged within the party that might have given support to women leaders as the ethnic and trade union groups were able to do for some men.⁴⁶ It is also worth noting that men who left party work were often able to use various networks to find themselves decent jobs, whereas the only option for Nielsen seemed to be office work.⁴⁷

Nielsen's dissatisfaction with her work in the party finally caused her to leave party work. Later she would regret her years of work for a party that she characterized as "bourgeois revisionist" for its lack of revolutionary ardour, and she would particularly regret the neglect her children had suffered. Still, she remained a Marxist, and she believed that women should focus their energies on working for the cause rather than on their personal woes.⁴⁸ Her enduring belief in socialism is characteristic of North America men and women who became socialists in the 1930's,⁴⁹ although, of course, most of those who stayed here have become democratic socialists.

The particular rigidity and self-righteousness of Nielsen's Marxism in the 1960's, while characteristic of communism, and particularly of Maoism at that time, is nevertheless, disturbing. One would think that a middle-aged woman who had just rejected one form of dogmatism would not embrace another so eagerly, yet her

fanaticism is understandable. She was a woman who believed in pouring herself into whatever she did, wholeheartedly. She did not hesitate to "burn her bridges" or to make sacrifices if she thought she was on the right path. This tendency is evident in her personal relationships as well as her political beliefs. In 1960, she used her savings to bring her daughter Sally and her four children to China, hoping, optimistically, that a stay there would help them over a difficult period. Needless to say, having three adults and four culture-shocked children living in two rooms did not work, and the experiment ended with bad feelings on both sides.

Dorise Nielsen was willing to undertake great tasks and embark on new paths throughout her life. Her Marxist beliefs and her opportunity to work in the Canadian party reinforced her tendency to suppress her doubts and fears, and, at first, gave her the opportunity to do work that she believed important, possibly even heroic. In the end, her experience left her a lonely woman, who despite a continuing concern about the human condition, and a deep belief in socialism, was able to find few people who measured up to her standards.

Had she remained in Canada, with greater access to information and broader scope for activity, her views might have moderated, and she might have become involved in the women's movement as did some of her contemporaries in the

left-wing. She had chosen, instead, to pursue her interest in revolutionary socialism abroad. Even though her life in China was sometimes difficult materially, she did not regret her decision. She was grateful to the Chinese for welcoming her and for giving her an opportunity to live in a society that she believed was on the leading edge of a new socialist world.

Footnotes

1. The Canada Tribune, July 21, 1945. In a letter to the editor, Torline Tufte of Denaire, Saskatchewan, sums up the reasons he thinks Nielsen lost: "She came back in 1945 with another party affiliation. She also told her electors that some of the Liberals were not too bad. The people did not like these changes..."
2. Norman Penner, Canadian Communism, 1988, pp. 244-246.
3. From the time of leaving the Canadian-Soviet Friendship Society, until going to England, Nielsen did office work for the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America.
4. Conroy, a geologist, was working in a research department at London University. Dorise was working in the Death Claims Department of the Post Office Savings Bank.
5. National Archives, Louise Harvey Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Louise Harvey, February 9, 1956.
6. In China Nielsen at first taught English at the Institute of Foreign Languages in Peking, and then worked as copy editor at the Foreign Languages Press. Conroy Godefroy worked in the Geological Ministry. In 1959 they went to live in the Yon Yi Bing, a compound for foreign experts. Nielsen became a Chinese citizen in 1962. In the same year she separated from Godefroy and went back to live at the Foreign Languages Press, where she lived and worked until her death in 1980.
7. Interview with William and Mary Kardash, August 14, 1987 and interview with William Kashtan, August 24, 1988.
8. National Archives, Louise Harvey Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Louise Harvey, September 18, 1966. In this letter she urges Louise Harvey to participate in building a new Canadian Marxist Party. She says that just because the Canadian party was "immature", does not mean Marxism is wrong.
9. National Archives, Christine Wong Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Christine Wong, March, 1978.
10. Christine Nielsen Private Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Sally Nielsen, January 5, 1967.
11. National Archives, Christine Wong Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Christine Nielsen, August 8, 1969.

12. National Archives, Louise Harvey Papers, Louise Harvey to Dorise Nielsen, December 11, 1962. Harvey repeats Nielsen's assessment and agrees with it.
13. Christine Wong Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Christine Wong, March 1, 1978.
14. Ibid.
15. National Archives, A.M. Nicholson Papers, Dorise Nielsen to A.M. Nicholson, September 24, 1975.
16. Dorise Nielsen, "Women Have Much to Fight For", The Canadian Tribune, September 26, 1949, p. 15, gives the best summary of the issues of women's legal and economic inferiority that she often pointed out.
17. The Canadian Tribune, "Canadian Women Past and Present" - the series ran from March to May, 1951.
18. Dorise Nielsen, "Fight for the Franchise", The Canadian Tribune, Nov. 1, 1948.
19. Nielsen attended the Second Congress of the Women's International Democratic Federation in Budapest in December 1948, and in November 1949, she attended a Council meeting of the WIDF in Moscow with two other Canadians, Mary Kardash and Libbie Park. At one of these conferences she met Dolores Ibarruri, La Pasionaria, a heroine of the Spanish Civil War, who she admired.
20. WIDF delegates visited a maternity hospital, a daycare centre, a school and a Pioneer Palace in Moscow. An account of these visits is given in Libbie and Frank Park, Moscow - as Two Canadians Saw It, published by the Canadian-Soviet Friendship Society. Then, as now, it appears that the care of children was a priority in the Soviet Union.
21. This point of view is supported in Barbara Taylor's book, Eve and the New Jerusalem (1983) and also in Beatrice Farnsworth's Aleksandra Kollontai (1980), and in Barbara Alpern Engel, "Women Revolutionaries: The Personal and the Political", Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (1980).
22. Sally Nielsen-Carter Private Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Sally Nielsen, January 5, 1967.

23. National Archives, Christine Wong Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Christine Wong, August 8, 1969. This letter begins by saying how badly the world needs a new social system, and that Nielsen believes that Marxism, though still relatively new and undeveloped, will provide that system. This quotation goes on to say: "...since we had worked almost entirely alone they ('the Toronto big-wigs') weren't very interested". Probably the experiment Nielsen is referring to is the unity movement they built which involved CCF'ers and Social Credit as well as communists, and the structure of local conventions that were to be held frequently so that Nielsen could report to her constituents, and be guided by their instructions. The structure of the United Progressive Movement in North Battleford is described by Bob Paul in "The United Progressives Dig In", The Western Farmer, March 17, 1941.
24. Bob Paul who had been Nielsen's friend and colleague since the early thirties, left his wife shortly after the war and came to Toronto to be with Nielsen and work for the party there. They lived together for a short time in 1947. Nielsen met Conroy Godefroy in the early 1950's. She lived with him in China until 1963. In both cases, it seems that Nielsen took the initiative in ending the relationships.
25. Joan Sangster, Dreams of Equality, p. 67.
26. Wendell MacLeod, Libbie Park, Stanley Ryerson, Bethune, The Montreal Years (1978), p. 160.
27. National Archives, Louise Harvey Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Louise Harvey, August 30, 1964.
28. Ibid
29. Tom McEwen, The Forge Glows Red (1974), p. 126.
30. Interview with Sally Nielsen, August 30, 1988.
31. Taped interview, Christine Nielsen to Georgina Taylor, July 1987.
32. Christine went back to school, attending university in the 1970's.
33. Sally and Christine both married in 1950. Sally has four children, Christine, five.

34. Both women have undertaken to gather material on their mother's life, some of which has been deposited in the National Archives. Sally is writing a biography of her mother.
35. Merrily Weisbord, The Strangest Dream (1983), pp. 229-231.
36. Kathleen Repka, who lived with Nielsen in 1946, and Mary Kardash, who took care of Sally 1943-1945, say that Nielsen was always concerned about her children, and did the best she could for them under the circumstances. Interview with March Kardash, August 14, 1987. Interview with Kathleen Repka, June 14, 1988.
37. Letter from Norman Penner to Faith Johnston, September 22, 1988.
38. Dorise Nielsen knew many of the people who were arrested, but was not involved. She testified in defence of Rose, to say that nothing of military importance had been discussed at a secret session of Parliament in 1944. See National Archives, Dorise Nielsen Papers, Life History #2, and The Canadian Tribune, June 22, 1946.
39. Apart from prices and peace, Nielsen also chose to discuss women's history, women in politics, the status of women in Canada, and the image of women in movies, among other topics. Still, the aim of all her articles was clearly to mobilize women in support of party campaigns.
40. Norman Penner to author, September 22, 1988. At this time the inner circle consisted of Tim Buck, Sam Carr, Stewart Smith, Leslie Morris, Stanley Ryerson and possibly William Kashton, "their power base was always the support of Moscow". According to Penner, the party's public figures who had a mass following (such as Nielsen and MacLeod) were never in the inner circle.
41. National Archives, Dorise Nielsen Papers, Volume 2, Life History, #1.
42. Joan Sangster, Dreams of Equality (1988), p. 55, p. 154.
43. Dorise Nielsen, "Understanding Needed in our Approach", The Canadian Tribune, February 27, 1950, p. 11.

44. This change may have occurred on account of budget cuts. The Canadian-Soviet Friendship Society had an independent budget. It is possible that her post as Women's Director became a part-time or unpaid position. According to Nielsen's daughter, Sally, Nielsen was later surprised and disappointed to discover that her new position was not considered a party post. Initially she may have accepted the work because of her friendship with Dyson Carter and Mary Jennison, who were also involved with the Canadian-Soviet Friendship Society, and she may have continued with it out of loyalty to the party.
45. Interview with Frank Park, July 19, 1989.
46. Joan Sangster, Dreams of Equality, p. 153.
47. Albert MacLeod, who during his time as MPP had become a friend of Leslie Frost, did consulting work for the Ontario government; William Kardash became manager of a co-op. Others may have had more problems with blacklisting. Shirley Endicott's first husband, Ralph Cook, who worked for the LPP in the 1950's had difficulty keeping teaching jobs on account of his previous party membership. See Shirley Endicott, Facing the Tiger (1987), p. 72. Nielsen also doubted that she would ever get a decent job in Canada on account of blacklisting.
48. National Archives, Louise Harvey Papers, Dorise Nielsen to Louise Harvey, August 30, 1964.
49. Paul Lyons, Philadelphia Communists.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the life of a woman to understand the circumstances, both personal and political, that resulted in her breaking the stereotype of women's primary commitment to home and family by undertaking heavy political responsibilities while raising children. It has also examined the sources of support that sustained her as a member of parliament, and as the first communist to hold that position. It has attempted to assess the consequences of her political work with the CPC on her life as a whole. This approach towards women in politics is similar to that of Georgina Taylor, who examined how CCF women (1932-1967) reconciled their family responsibilities with political work; however, this paper has been able to investigate this question in greater depth by examining the life of only one woman.

Because there are so few precedents for this approach to studying women in politics in Canada, this paper is a sort of pioneering effort in studying the life of a woman who was herself a type of pioneer. Now as more and more women have been elected both federally and provincially in a society that still allots women the major responsibilities for child care, the question of whether or not family responsibilities can be reconciled with a career in politics is highly relevant.

In the case of Nielsen, her activism resulted from the particular political environment in Saskatchewan in the thirties, as well as her own anger at the suffering imposed by the depression, and her need for meaningful activity beyond her home. She began her political activity without particular ambitions for herself; however, when she was chosen candidate in the federal election, partly because of her talents and charisma, but partly, also, because of the efforts of local communists, of which she was one, to set up and control the United Progressive Movement, she had the courage of her socialist convictions and took up her work as candidate, and then as member of parliament, wholeheartedly.

Her allegiance to the CPC, as the true socialists on the Canadian scene, and her own personal belief that people should make decisions and stick to them, sustained her through her parliamentary career and her later work as a CPC functionary. Her personal and political creeds helped her deal with her own personal hardships, including missing her children, and the guilt she felt about their problems, as well as the decline in her status within the party after 1945.

This paper proposes that Nielsen was not a feminist in the modern sense of the word. Although she was concerned about women's problems, both in the labour force and the family, and raised these issues in parliament and later

in the communist press, it seems she accepted the Marxist analysis that socialism, alone, including the socialization of childcare and housework, would bring sexual equality. She also accepted the Marxist belief that any separate movement for women's liberation would disrupt working class unity. Still Nielsen's perceptions about the inequalities women faced in the home and in the work place, and her loyalty to a political movement that she believed would give women greater equality, make her a feminist in the context of her time. One woman I interviewed remembered Nielsen as "the first feminist I'd met"¹ and another remembered New Worlds for Women being one of the first books she had read about the role of women, and finding Nielsen's emphasis on daycare for children radical at the time.²

Nielsen's own courage and independence in pursuing a meaningful life also distinguish her from many of her contemporaries who allowed the pressures of home and family to limit their horizons. Unfortunately, Nielsen's strong need for interests beyond her home, became evident to her only after she had married and started a family. In this regard she was unlike some exceptional women of her generation such as Simone de Beauvoir, Margaret Mead, and Lucy Sprague Mitchell,³ who first decided what they wanted to accomplish and then chose male partners who could help them.

Although Nielsen benefited from the friendship and practical support of women like Violet McNaughton, Mary Kardash, Heidi Vockeroth, and others, if she had any mentors, it seems that they were men, not because she believed in men's superior abilities, but because in politics she inhabited a man's world, and she needed to learn from people who had greater experience than she had. Unlike Violet McNaughton, and some other women who had been involved in the early farm movement and in the suffrage movement, it seems that she saw no need for separate women's organizations or for women's sections of mixed membership groups. In this respect, despite her high profile, she had much in common with other women who became involved in political parties in the interwar years - she believed that women had more in common with certain groups of men than they had with women as a whole.⁴

The experience of women in politics in Canada from the 1930's to the 1950's is a fertile field for study. In the course of researching this paper I have discovered a number of communist women who, like Nielsen, were political leaders in their communities, yet none has been the object of a study. I would like to mention particularly Minerva Miller, Mary Kardash, Libbie Park, Edna Blois Ryerson, and Helen Anderson Coulson. Until more groundwork has been done, it will be difficult to make valid generalizations about the links between the personal and public lives of

Canadian women in politics, or to determine whether socialist women in that period played a significant role in laying the foundation for the emergence of the modern women's movement.

Footnotes

1. Interview with Kathleen Repka, June 14, 1989. Kathleen, who was younger than Dorise, was surprised by her assertion that a women's sexual satisfaction in a partnership was just as important as a man's. She also remembers Dorise sometimes being critical of the hard work expected of ethnic women in the party in putting on large fund-raising dinners.
2. Conversation with Pearl Blazer, August 16, 1989.
3. Joyce Antler, "Feminism as Life Process: The Life of Lucy Sprague Mitchell", Feminist Studies, Spring, 1981.
4. Veronica Strong-Boag, The New Day Recalled, p. 196.

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Appendix 1

Canadian Women Elected to the House of
Commons from 1921 to 1967

Year Elected	Member of Parliament	Province
1921	Agnes Macphail	Ontario
1935	Martha Black	Yukon
1940	Dorise Nielsen	Saskatchewan
1941	Cora Casselman	Alberta
1945	Gladys Strum	Saskatchewan
1950	Ellen Fairclough	Ontario
1953	Margaret Aitken	Ontario
1953	Sybill Bennett	Ontario
1953	Ann Shipley	Ontario
1958	Jean Casselman	Ontario
1960	Judy LaMarsh	Ontario
1961	Margaret Macdonald	Prince Edward Island
1962	Isabel Hardie	Northwest Territories
1963	Margaret Konantz	Manitoba
1963	Pauline Jewett	Ontario
1964	Eloise Jones	Saskatchewan
1964	Margaret Rideout	New Brunswick
1965	Grace MacInnis	British Columbia

Source: Catherine Wallace, "What Would the Suffragists Think of
Our Voting Record," Chatelaine, November 1974.

Appendix 2

North Battleford

General Election - 1921			
Claudius Charles Davies	Progressive	8,786	
William Wellington Livingston	Liberal	4,596	
Harold Herbert	Conservative	744	
General Election - 1925			
Cameron Ross McIntosh	Liberal	4,204	
Claudius Charles Davies	Progressive	2,697	
Leonard Arthur Cattnach Panton	Conservative	1,830	
General Election - 1926			
Cameron Ross McIntosh	Liberal	6,147	
Charles Edwin Long	Conservative	2,950	
General Election - 1930			
Cameron Ross McIntosh	Liberal	7,168	
William MacKenzie	Independent	6,073	
Arthur O. Rose	Progressive	2,248	
General Election - 1935			
Cameron Ross McIntosh	Liberal	7,039	
Robert Harry Watson	Social Credit	4,412	
Hill Hamilton	C.C.F.	4,168	
General Election - 1940			
Mrs. Dorise Winifred Nielson	Unity	10,500	
Cameron Ross McIntosh	Liberal	7,868	
General Election - 1945			
Frederick William Townley-Smith	C.C.F.	5,049	
John Hornby Harrison	Liberal	4,420	
Mrs. Dorise Winifred Nielson	Unity	2,124	
Albert C. Cadieu	Prog. Conservative	2,039	
John William Evanishen	Social Credit	1,525	
Cameron Ross McIntosh	Liberal	847	

Source: Directory of Municipal, Provincial and Federal Elections for the N.W.T. and Saskatchewan, 1887-1966, published by the Saskatchewan Archives Board, 1967.

FOR MILITANT MOTHERS

Dear Editor —

Letters to the Mail Bag are typical of the growing consciousness and militant feminism which are coming more into evidence as the failure of our present economic system is forced upon our recognition.

"Elizabeth Margaret" asks "Why do not mothers rise?" and "Tired of Being a Poof" thinks we should elect women instead of men and solve our troubles quickly. I am afraid it is not such a simple matter as that.

Living as we do in an age of swiftly moving events it is difficult to obtain a correct perspective.

From a study of history we see that we have come to a period when vital and great changes must be made for the continuance of our life as rational human beings. Looking backward we find that slavery, feudalism, and lastly, capitalism which grew as a result of machine

production, were all necessary in their time for the development of the human race.

Just as slavery gave place to feudalism, feudalism to capitalism, so must capitalism give way to a new socialist order. Each new system had its seeds in the preceding one and grew from it, carrying on all that was good and useful. So will socialism carry on and continue the machine production of disintegrating capitalism and solve the problem of distribution which our present system has failed to do. This failure has planted the seeds of socialism within our present society.

Since this fact is recognized by so many intelligent and thoughtful people I cannot understand why the one great socialist state in existence is not studied and examined more than it is. Just as previous forms of society did not always change in every country at the same time, socialism will come to each country only when the people themselves take the lead and help in its institution.

It is natural that the new and unknown should be feared by many. They would rather continue in their present misery than take an intelligent and intelligent about a new order. But, here is my point. The socialist state is not unknown. It is not a dream of fools, a fragment of the imagination, but a reality. Why not spend some time and study the U.S.S.R. where over one-third of the world's surplus people are busy constructing a new society. There you will find the theory you seek. Then you will see what a duty lies as intelligent and militant mothers. Yours is the immediate job of spreading knowledge and truth instead of the lies and superstitions which so many women read and believe in the newspapers. Stir up to activity and spread your own enthusiasm like a vigorous germ among the inactive and apathetic women, so taking your rightful place in the evolutionary process which is taking place in our time.

I'll sign myself, Judy O'Grady

FIND WIDER INTERESTS

Dear Editor —

How many readers and contributors to the Mail Bag have noticed that, compared with the Teen-Age, Young Co-ops, and Open Forum, the space at our disposal is very limited? I really believe this to be our own fault, and I'll tell you why. Our letters until recently have been limited to a somewhat narrow sphere and have lacked the wide outlook and varied interest which would merit greater space.

I can well imagine that if our cave-dwelling ancestors happened to have poor hunting, it was pretty smart of their mates to devise some way to eke out the scanty supply of food. What I can't understand is that in 1937 we women are still finding ways and means to make a little go a long way, when we know we live in a land of plenty. How foolish it is of us to think that because we cut our hair, smoke if we please, wear shorts and other types of men's clothing, we are emancipated. Because of their particular function of bearing children, these ancestors of ours were sent back from the hunt, to sit in the cave and mend the fire, to stir the pot, and mind the children.

We are still doing these same things today. Forced to compete in the overcrowded market for jobs, or suffer from unemployment, forced to accept and live upon a lower wage than men in nearly all occupations, we still think we are lucky to change this slavery for that of the cave, the cooking pot, and the fire. The cave would be preferable to the draughty, ill-ventilated, dark, insect-infested log shacks

which thousands of Saskatchewan women call home.

I read once that "Servitude debases man to the point where he comes to love it." How true that is of us women. Many of us regard our slavery and drudgery as a fine thing and vie with each other in showing our willingness to debase ourselves further. Countless women have stood on the threshold of their home and realized the limitations and restrictions imposed upon them, but so many have not yet realized them. To be the real mates of men we must cast off the slavery of the home as it exists today and gain our economic freedom and equality. Marxian socialism is the only road to this freedom.

And so I make this plea. Leave off writing about rag-rug making and hard-time cookery recipes. Freshen up your minds, read more, think more, then let us know through this page how you think we can help in the instituting of a new world order. Let us deluge the Mail Bag with letters of wider interest, and I believe we can challenge the Open Forum and gain as much space for our letters.

Before closing may I ask why Mary Jane W. goes to Russia for pictures of starving children? What about Spain? What about every country governed by capital? Why, right here in northern Saskatchewan I could show you some starving children. Perhaps not hungry, but children who have lived through a very hard winter on the most unappetizing, unvaried diet who have suffered from epidemics of infectious diseases one after the other, and whose little wasted forms certainly show it. These are the wild prairie birds of ours are far from the jovial creatures they should be. We are allowing our young generation to be starved, both in mind and in mind.

Let's use the Mail Bag for the cause of the children to save them from the destitution of today for a brighter tomorrow. Judy O'Grady

Woman's place is everywhere

Understanding needed in our approach

By DORISE NIELSEN

THE other day I received a letter from a progressive woman in Toronto, with some good, helpful criticism. Through this column I want to thank Taimi Davis for her letter, and to let her know how much I value what she wrote.

What happened is this. When speaking to a group of women in the east end of Toronto about the life of Soviet women, Taimi pointed out how I made a bad mistake in the way I presented one thing to this group, which was composed mainly of housewives.

I had told them of the wonderful way in which equality of the sexes is guaranteed by law and practised for so long now, in the USSR, that people have been quite accustomed to it. Opportunities for women to work outside the home prevail everywhere, and there are many facilities to make it possible for a woman to run a home as well as work outside, that nearly all of them take advantage of this.

In the maternity hospital I visited, the doctor in charge asked many women what they did, and one after the other they answered: I'm a worker in a factory; a teacher; a shop worker; I drive a bus; I am a scientist, etc. Only two women replied, "I'm a housewife" and I mentioned the fact that the doctor said "Tut, tut," to them as though to be only a housewife was pretty awful.

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TAIMI pointed out to me, that in Canada today, when we have not arrived at the point where we have equality guaranteed by law, have not in fact arrived at the point where even all women think we should have it, the women in our society who cares for her family and creates a happy home is fulfilling a necessary function.

In presenting this little story of the way in which the Soviet woman doctor spoke to housewives, I had been clumsy and had hurt the housewives present at the meeting, who living in a vastly different society were proud of their role, and conscious of what an important job they had.

The tremendous changes that are made in family relationships and the home under socialism are so great that we must be careful in how we present this to women in our society, who have no idea of these things. Everyone judges things by their own experience. Women in our country know that the homemaker's job is important, and they can easily be antagonized if they are led to believe that as socialist women we have no regard for them and what they do.

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OUR great job is to work with women on questions they do understand. For the promotion of safe playgrounds in their community, for day care centres, for the beginnings of facilities to free them from some of the domestic routine which ties them down for so many hours a day. They will learn then from their own experience how good it is to have community conveniences to help them, and from that go on to realize what complete emancipation under socialism will mean to them. When they understand, they'll fight for it, not before.

In my not too careful telling of the story of the Soviet doctor's remarks, I was doing the very thing I wanted not to do. I antagonized the very women who could have been led to understand the glorious position of women under socialism, by not thinking carefully enough of the conditions

under which they lived, and own experiences.

Thanks again, Taimi. I'll do better next time.

How I wish more of our ers would send me their thoughts on questions such as this, to sure that we all have problems at different times, in how to sent some viewpoint. We delve more deeply into the issues that face Canadian women and understand the way to problems that women have face and solve somehow.

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DOES it seem tedious to women who are already vinced socialists that they discuss with a neighbor, just she is going to manage some household problem? It would tainly be more inspiring, some gressive women think, to d with others like themselves wonderful advantages of a ist society. But doing that not bring socialism to Canada.

Only when socialist women where Canadian women are work and think, only when ist women can project them into the family life as it is ly lived in our country working people, and helping some of the tremendous tems with which mothers have grapple, shall we ever achieve goal for which we work.

It needs patience and a deep man kindness and understanding and withal a correct Marxist approach to the question of among women. It will help us to refresh ourselves by ing what Lenin has to say this, and to have lively sion among clubs and in meetings on the important concerning women's problem.

Above all let's all be pr being women, and be proud and heading high for a rich life that we can do it in such a way that courage and not cowardice women in the home should led slowly but surely to the woman workers of the ist socialism.

Woman's place is everywhere—

Why more women are not in politics

By DORISE NIELSEN

IN THE *Montreal Standard* of March 25, Kate Aitken, in her column "Women in Politics" writes that Canadian women are making a poor showing politically. She deplors the fact that there are only five women in legislatures, one reeve and none in parliament.

Kate Aitken then asks the question: "What is wrong with Canadian women in politics?" For her answers she asks a man to comment. "None would let his name be used," she wonders why?

The first kind of service organization, said women are too emotional, can't take criticism and go "swoopy" on the slightest excuse.

The mayor of a large Canadian city will bet it was Toronto, said women are a nuisance — always "going off about relief or unemployment."

An outstanding MP (outstanding only because of his assistance I should say) says women are no good to a party. "No real man wants a woman to represent him — it should be the other way around." Here is bourgeois male chauvinism in all its glory.

Kate Aitken lends assent to this kind of propaganda by writing not a word of protest, adding not a sentence that would condemn such lies with even a part of the truth.

THE reason women are few on the political platforms of our country is because as a nation we are still dominated by capitalist traditions and ideas.

Capitalism maintains paternalism as part of its property rights and male superiority to bolster and protect these rights. It says women's place is in the home — to care for men's comfort and to give him heirs for his property.

Training for women under capitalist governments bars her from certain skills, professions, executive positions in business and politics. Only 20 percent of Canadian professional women are other than teachers or nurses.

In the same way women are paid less when doing the same work as men, unemployment benefits are less — and in many ways they are treated as second class citizens. They can't even sit on juries in Ontario nor vote in municipal elections in Montreal.

CHEAP pulp magazines like the *Standard* purposely keep such ideas regarding women's inferiority before the public to mold public opinion. What object did Kate Aitken have in this column but to perpetuate and foster the reactionary idea that women are not suited for political leadership?

Only the Marxist parties of the world help women to understand their position in society and to change it. How do they do this? By helping women to overcome their age-long servitude to home and family and promote them as citizens of equality with men.

In the Soviet Union alone there are more women members of the Supreme Soviet than there are women members in all the parliaments of the capitalist world put together.

Such women have proved their aptitude and ability to become legislators. They are a living refutation of the drivel Kate Aitken's collection of men gave as their answers.

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ONLY one man among her collection had anything like a correct answer. He was listed as the head of an employment service for women. He said: "Women can't completely forget home, children, husbands, meals. Unless a woman is independently wealthy enough to employ competent help — she should not take any public office."

That's the crux of it. It is being tried to add the multitudinous tasks of the home and family that robs women of the opportunity to compete with men on an equal footing, not her inferiority. It is only in the Soviet Union, the New Democracies and now beginning in China, that women are not only independently wealthy but all women have services provided to help take care of their home, children, husband, and their shoulders.

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