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**THE IDEAS OF WILLIAM COTTON:
A MARXIST VIEW OF CANADIAN SOCIETY (1908-14)**

by Edward M. Penton.

Thesis presented to the Department
of History of the University of
Ottawa as partial fulfilment of the
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Socialism was a small but not insignificant force in Canada during the period 1900 to 1914. The Socialist Party of British Columbia, founded in 1901, expanded in 1904 to become the Socialist Party of Canada with locals dotted across Canada. The Social Democratic Party of Canada was founded in 1911 and by 1914 it had a membership of over 5,000 in 229 locals.¹ At various times there were four socialists in the British Columbian legislature. In 1904 two of them were able to secure the passage of important reform legislation. American socialist weeklies such as Wilshires Magazine, the International Socialist Review and particularly the Appeal to

¹ J.F. Cahan, A Survey of the Political Attitudes of the Ontario Labour Movement, 1850-1935, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1945, p. 30.

Reason circulated in Canada. So too did the books of the American socialist writers, Edward Bellamy, Jack London and Upton Sinclair. Merrie England, by the English socialist Robert Blatchford, was widely read.²

During the years 1908 to 1914 a socialist paper, Cotton's Weekly, was published in Cowansville, a town in the Eastern townships region of Quebec. It circulated throughout the country and at the height of its success had a national circulation of over 30,000. During his tour of the prairies just before the war E. B. Mitchell noted that there were many faithful readers of Cotton's Weekly³ and Ronald Grantham, in his thesis on the socialist movement in British Columbia, remarked that the paper was widely read in that province.⁴

In his book, The Canadian Left, Norman Penner

² P. Fox, "Early Socialism in Canada", in Aitchison, The Political Process in Canada, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1963, p. 73.

³ E.B. Mitchell, In Western Canada Before the War (London, 1915), p. 201 quoted in K. McNaught, A Prophet in Politics, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1959, p. 54.

⁴ R. Grantham, Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in British Columbia (1898-1933), unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1942.

has written that there was "a complete absence of any intellectuals in the socialist ranks".⁵ This is not entirely true. Although he never developed an integrated theory of Canadian development, William Cotton, publisher and editor of Cotton's Weekly, did offer his readers a weekly critical analysis of many aspects of Canadian society from a Marxist point of view. The result was a view of Canada far different from that of a keen observer like O. D. Skelton. Skelton's views have been incorporated in the standard works on the period. Unfortunately, up to now, Cotton has been virtually unknown. Yet his original viewpoint makes his view of Canada one which will further enrich our growing knowledge of the period.

William Ulric Cotton was born in 1879 on a farm about three miles from Cowansville,⁶ the youngest child in a family which included a brother, Charles, and two sisters. Shortly after William's birth his mother died leaving her husband, Charles, to raise the four children.

⁵ N. Penner, The Canadian Left, Prentice-Hall, Scarborough, 1977, p. 41.

⁶ Cotton's Weekly, 2 Mar. 1911, p. 1.

As a child William had the bones of a tubercular hip removed and for the rest of his life he was forced to use crutches and frequently suffered considerable pain.⁷ After attending local schools for his primary education, he spent four years at the L'Institut Feller, a French Baptist school in the Eastern Townships. After obtaining a B. A. from McGill in 1901, he entered the university's law school where he had outstanding success. He graduated in 1904, winner of the gold medal for highest achievement in the final year and the recipient of \$1100 in prizes of which \$750 was a travelling scholarship donated by Sir William Macdonald whom Cotton was later to call "the tobacco thief of Montreal".⁸ After a year of travelling and studying in France he returned to Cowansville where he established a law practice in 1905.⁹

In 1908 Cotton purchased a local weekly newspaper, the Cowansville Observer, which had served the local community since its founding in 1871 by an immigrant Scot,

⁷ Richard Cotton, Dunnville, Ontario, letter, 13 February 1969, to the author.

⁸ C.W., 14 July 1910, p. 3.

⁹ Ibid., 2 Mar. 1911, p. 1.

John Massie. In 1896 Massie sold the paper to a John Barker, who, never able to make it a financial success, sold it to Cotton in September 1908.¹⁰ In early December of 1908 Cotton changed its name to Cotton's Weekly. Overnight the Cowansville Observer was changed from a local paper, which reported the news of the Cowansville area, to a national paper which was devoted to, as the inscription under the mast head read, " ... the propagation of the principles of International Socialism".

The month following his purchase of The Observer Cotton ran in the federal election as an independent candidate in his own constituency of Brome. What is noteworthy is that he campaigned as an independent, not as a socialist. Still, there were some strong socialist undertones in the campaign Cotton waged in the recently acquired Observer. He was prepared to fight the battles of the farming community and the working man against the Liberals and Conservatives who were controlled by the railroads and

¹⁰ Marion Phelps, Knowlton, Quebec, letter, 15 January 1969, to the author.

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banks.¹¹ But the main thrust of the campaign was his claim to bring independent judgement to bear on all issues because he was tied to no party. "We desire to go to Ottawa because the country needs a representative ... who will act for the good of Canada apart from all party considerations."¹² Cotton managed to win only 37 of the over 3,000 votes cast.¹³

"I was made a socialist by Wayland of the Appeal to Reason",¹⁴ Cotton once wrote. Julius Wayland, founder and editor of the enormously successful American socialist paper The Appeal to Reason, visited Cotton in Cowansville sometime during 1908.¹⁵ According to Cotton's account, the result of his meeting with Wayland was "another organ for the advocacy of the co-operative commonwealth based upon the common ownership of the means of production, owned, controlled and run by and for the working class".¹⁶

11 The Observer, 8 Oct. 1908, p. 1.

12 Ibid.

13 The Canadian Parliamentary Guide, Ottawa, 1909, p. 158.

14 C.W., 24 Mar. 1910, p. 1.

15 Ibid., 9 Dec. 1909, p. 3.

16 Ibid.

Although Cotton never mentioned his name again, a curious omission in view of the impact Cotton claimed Wayland had on his life, there is good reason to accept his claim that he was converted by Wayland. After all, just over one month after running as an independent candidate in the election held on October 26, 1908, Cotton published the first issue of the socialist paper, Cotton's Weekly.

Therefore, at almost thirty years of age, Cotton turned his back on the chance for a distinguished, profitable, not to mention, respectable career, that his brilliant record at law school promised him. Instead he decided to publish a paper espousing a cause scarcely known to most Canadians. Although there are very real risks in playing amateur psychologist, Cotton's conversion does deserve some explanation, however inexpert and incomplete.

William's father, Charles, was clearly a man of strong, independent character who had a deep influence on his two sons. Following his wife's death he successfully raised four children, virtually without help from anyone.

else,¹⁷ and instilled in them strong liberal and humanitarian ideas.¹⁸ Years later he gave his son William financial backing to build a new printing shop for Cotton's Weekly.¹⁹ That the local sheriff of a rural district in Quebec's Eastern Townships would have supported a paper whose ideas must have been repugnant to the populace he served indicated a strong independence. The careers the two sons followed testified to the father's influence on them. Although both of them became lawyers, neither became a partner in a prosperous law office defending the interests of the wealthy. Charles Jr. ran his own law office on St. James St. but never made any money because he was too busy helping the indigent.²⁰ William's concern for the exploited was revealed in the pages of Cotton's Weekly. When he did practise law, briefly in 1915, and again in the 1920s, it was with his brother helping the unfortunate.²¹ William's son Carl speaks of his father's

¹⁷ Hilda Smith, Montreal, letter, 3 Apr. 1969, to the author.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ C.W., 4 May 1911, p. 4.

²⁰ Hilda Smith, letter.

²¹ Richard Cotton, letter.

passionate hatred of injustice and cruelty. He recalls, on more than one occasion, his father going into the street to stop a man from administering a harsh beating to a horse which was moving too slowly.²²

William Cotton was more than just independent. He was a definite outsider, impractical at handling every day matters,²³ considered brilliant but eccentric by those who knew him.²⁴ His crippled condition was certainly a factor in developing his solitary disposition. Unable to play sports, he spent a good deal of his leisure time reading widely and voraciously as well as researching for debates,²⁵ activities which do not allow much social contact.[#] During the time he published Cotton's Weekly he was a very lonely man. It could hardly have

²² Carl Cotton, personal interview with the author at Chateauguay, Quebec, 23 Nov. 1969.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Hilda Smith, letter.

²⁵ Richard Cotton, letter.

[#] Whether his infirmity had other psychological consequences, e.g., the development of an inferiority complex, is difficult to know. None of the available evidence suggests any.

been otherwise running a socialist weekly in rural Quebec at the turn of the century. In describing the fate of the socialist in contemporary society he was obviously describing himself when he wrote, "(the socialist) lives lonely, more lonely than his fellow man who can share the thoughts of others. And from this loneliness he gathers strength. He is thrown back upon his own individuality and his own personality develops".²⁶

Cotton claimed that he was an intellectual, or, more precisely, "an intellectual machine for you (his readers) to use".²⁷ He had, he said, spent his life "acquiring information from books, knowledge from the written word and wisdom from the study of my fellow man".²⁸ His readings eventually led him to a particular interest in the rise and disintegration of societies and the efforts at various times in history to establish utopian communities. It was inevitable that such an interest should have led eventually to the writings of Marx and Engels.²⁹

26 C.W., 28 Apr. 1910, p. 1.

27 Ibid., 14 July 1910, p. 3.

28 Ibid.

29 Richard Cotton, letter.

Thus the man whom Julius Wayland met in the late autumn of 1908 was ripe for conversion to socialism. Cotton's concern for justice, his solitary nature, his intellectual interest in how societies rise and fall and the various attempts to establish utopian communities, prepared him, intellectually and psychologically, for undertaking the arduous task of proselytizing a doctrine, unknown to most Canadians and threatening to many.

The format of Cotton's Weekly changed very little during the six years of publication. Cotton did reduce the size of the paper from eight to four pages in November 1909³⁰, but aside from cutting out the woman's page, reducing the size of such features as "News of International Socialism" and eliminating what little was left of local news columns, he made no substantial changes. Most of page one and often a good deal of page four were written by Cotton himself. These two pages have provided the bulk of the source material for this thesis.

³⁰ He explained that paper cost too much and that the staff did not have time to publish a good eight page paper. Cotton's Weekly, 4 Nov. 1911, p. 3. Another reason, not mentioned, was the loss of advertising after he changed the name and character of the paper.

Articles by prominent English and American socialists - H.M. Hyndman, Robert Blatchford, Eugene Debs, Robert Hunter, John Spargo, Charles Kerr were some - and occasionally articles by Canadian socialists - Gustav Praeger of Berlin, Roscoe Fillmore of Albert, N.B., Edwin O'Brien of Alberta - appeared on page two. There was nearly always a segment from a strongly tendentious serial. J.R. Mahon's Toilers and Idlers began in the October 14, 1909 issue and ran for 26 weeks. Other contributors included Edward Bellamy, Jack London and Upton Sinclair. Often there was an advertisement for books on socialism which could be purchased from Cotton's Book Department. The advertisement, which was headed in heavy black type "The Socialist Vote Increases Only Through Education", encouraged readers to enlighten themselves and others by setting aside certain evenings each week to study socialism. In the April 15, 1909 issue some of the books listed included John Spargo's The Socialists, "We know of no other book in the whole of the literature of socialism that will make so good a first impression" (Cotton's emphasis), The Communist Manifesto "... first published in 1848 (it) is still recognized ... as the cleanest statement of the principles of International

Socialism", Engels, Socialism - Utopian and Scientific, no comment, and two volumes of Capital, again, no comment. Cotton's highest praise was reserved for books by the German socialist Karl Kautsky whom Cotton called "the ablest living exponent of socialism. Anything he writes is worth reading 6 or 7 times."³¹ Except for books by Jack London, fiction was rarely advertised.

Most of page three was devoted to encouraging readers to find more subscribers. Cotton used a variety of tactics. He offered prizes. In March 1909 readers could obtain, free of charge, one volume of Marx's Capital for every twenty-five subscriptions submitted. In July 1909 a \$5 prize was offered to the reader who sent in the greatest number of subscriptions during the month. In August 1909 the prize was \$10 in books. In 1911 the Century Contest promised \$100 to the reader who submitted five half-yearly subscriptions for the most consecutive weeks. He set targets. In the May 20th, 1909 issue he urged readers to push circulation over 3,000 so a new typesetting machine could be bought. Banners such as

³¹ C.W., 4 Mar. 1909, p. 2.

"Cotton's Needs a Circulation of 10,000" which appeared across the top of the page in the September 23, 1909 issue were frequently used. In the column "Firing Line" Cotton congratulated those readers who had submitted subscriptions and occasionally admonished his readership at large for letting him down in the fight to spread socialist ideas.

The increase in circulation was impressive.* Cotton first published circulation figures on December 3, 1908. The figure for that issue was 2,000. By December 2, 1909 circulation had increased to 4,560 and by August 18, 1910 to over 10,000. Over the next year and a half there was relatively little increase - the December 21, 1911 issue was only 12,139. However, there was a dramatic increase in 1912 - the circulation figure in the July 25 issue was 21,197 and the figure for December 19 was 28,228. A year later circulation reached its peak - 31,000 in December 18, 1913. The last issue in existence - December 10, 1914 - had a circulation of 18,700. The paper was truly national. Of 24,773 copies published on

* There was no independent audit of Cotton's circulation figures. However, it would have been out of character for him to deliberately inflate the figures.

October 10, 1912, 9,093 went to Ontario, 4,779 to B.C., 6,927 to the Prairie provinces, 1,796 to the Maritimes, 1,261 to Quebec and 277 to the Yukon. Foreign circulation was 540 of which 155 went to Newfoundland. *

Cotton never explained how he financed the purchase of The Observer in September 1908. In February 1911 he announced the formation of Cotton's Co-operative Publishing Company capitalized at \$20,000, the money to be raised by the sale of 2,000 shares at \$10 each.³² Cotton was never very successful in persuading people to buy shares; by February 1913 only 447 had been bought.³³ In fact, it was Cotton's father who provided the bulk of the financing from the half million dollars which he had inherited from an elder brother.³⁴ Although there is no indication of how much he invested, it is clear that, had it not been for Sheriff Cotton, Cotton's Weekly would never have been published.

While Cotton had to depend on his father for capital, the financial statements issued by Cotton's

³² Ibid., 23 Feb. 1911, p. 1.

³³ Ibid., 13 Feb. 1913, p. 3.

³⁴ Richard Cotton, personal interview with the author at Ottawa, 2 July 1976.

Co-operative Publishing Company for 1912 and 1913 - the only financial statements ever published in Cotton's Weekly - suggest that he was reasonably successful in managing the paper. In 1912 the company recorded revenue of \$11,542 and expenses of \$11,466 for a modest profit of \$76.³⁵ The following year revenue was \$11,513 and expenses \$11,606 for a net loss of \$93.00.³⁶ In both years subscriptions to the paper provided about 50% of the revenue, job printing, 20%, advertising, 10% and the sale of booklets and leaflets, 5%.³⁷

The subscription price changed a number of times in the six years of publication. In December 1909 an annual subscription was one dollar. It was reduced to fifty cents in March 1909 and to twenty-five cents in November 1912. The price increased to twenty-five cents for forty weeks in January 1913.

³⁵ C.W., 13 Feb. 1913, p. 3.

³⁶ Ibid., 12 Feb. 1914, p. 3.

³⁷ Ibid., 13 Feb. 1913, p. 3. and
12 Feb. 1914, p. 3.

Cotton published his paper in the last six years of the period 1896 to 1914, a period which saw unprecedented prosperity and a profound change in the nature of the Canadian economy. The settlement of the prairie lands and the development of the wheat economy was a dynamic factor in generating the period of prosperity. The area of the Northwest, which became the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta in 1905, saw an increase in population from just under 100,000 in 1891 to over 1,000,000 by 1911.³⁸ The growth of the prairie population meant a dramatic growth in wheat production. In 1901 the prairie lands produced just 25 million bushels. Ten years later the amount produced was 195 million bushels,³⁹ almost an eight fold increase.

At the same time as the prairie farm economy was experiencing such spectacular growth, the proportion of people living in rural areas actually fell. Whereas the

³⁸ E. McInnis, Canada, A Political and Social History, Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, Ltd., Toronto, 1969, p. 437.

³⁹ O.D. Skelton "General Economic History 1867-1912", in A. Short and A. Doughty, Canada and Its Provinces, Vol. 9, Sec. V, The Dominion: Industrial Expansion, Part I, Brook and Company, Toronto, 1914, p. 244.

rural percentage of the total population was 63 percent in 1901, it was 55 percent in 1911.⁴⁰ Nor was there any doubt as to where a good number of the rural population was going. During the same ten years Toronto grew from a population of 328,172 to one of 490,504, Vancouver from 29,340 to 120,847 and Winnipeg from 42,340 to 136,035,⁴¹ to give just three examples. The irony was that this shift was due, in good part, to the very prosperity of the prairie economy. The various demands of the farmers for manufactured goods were a powerful stimulant to eastern industries which were able to absorb those who chose, or were forced, to leave the land. So in spite of the amazing growth of the Western Canadian farm economy the trend was clear. Canada was rapidly changing from being a predominantly agricultural country to a country where the majority of people lived in cities.

Urban growth was the creature of industrial development. While never achieving the dramatic growth

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 196.

⁴¹ Canada Year Book, 1932, (Ottawa 1933), 103 as found in R. Brown and R. Cook, Canada 1896-1921, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1974, p. 98.

of the wheat economy, manufacturing production did make substantial progress. Between 1900 and 1910 the value of primary steel manufactured increased from a little more than \$3 million to almost \$15 million. The value of textile production doubled, as did that of agricultural implements. The most impressive advance was in the manufacture of railway rolling stock where the value of the goods produced jumped from \$5,178,000 to \$25,221,000. The total value of goods produced was almost \$565 million in 1910 as opposed to just over \$214½ million in 1900.⁴² Increased production meant, not surprisingly, an increase in the number of companies opening up. Whereas in 1900 only 53 Dominion charters were issued, in 1911 and 1912 658 were issued.⁴³ A significant aspect of this growth was the change in the capitalization of new industries. In 1900 the average capitalization of a new industry was roughly \$191 thousand; the corresponding figure in 1910 was

⁴² W.A. Mackintosh, The Economic Background of Dominion Provincial Relations, Toronto, 1964, p. 48 as quoted in R. Brown and R. Cook, Canada 1896-1921, p. 85.

⁴³ H.G. Staples "The Recent Consolidation Movement in Canadian Industry" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1922), cited 11, as quoted in R. Brown and R. Cook, Canada 1896-1921, p. 91.

about \$670 thousand.⁴⁴ So not only was there a significant growth in the number of new industries, but the average new one opened in 1910 was considerably larger than its counterpart opened in 1900.

Nowhere was the trend towards large scale business more evident than in the consolidations that took place, particularly after 1909. In that year nine consolidations with an authorized capital totalling \$134 million were made. There were twenty-two mergers capitalized at \$157 million in 1910. Among them were Dominion Cannery Ltd. (a consolidation of thirty-four factories of Canadian Cannery and fourteen independent companies), Dominion Steel Corporation and the British Columbia Packers Association. In 1911 the Canada Bread Co. and Sherwin Williams Co. were just two of fourteen consolidations capitalized at \$96 million. In 1912 there were thirteen mergers with capitalization of \$97 million.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Thus it was evident that the very nature of industrial enterprise was undergoing a dramatic change. In short, in the first decade of the century, the small enterprise which employed relatively few and catered to a local market was giving way to the large corporation which employed many thousands and produced for a national market.

Growth in industry meant a corresponding growth in the labour force. In the manufacturing sector the number of employees increased from 339,173 in 1900 to 515,203 by 1910.⁴⁶ Although the vast majority of Canadian workers remained unorganized by 1914, still, union membership did increase substantially during the period. Between 1900 and 1913 it increased from about 50,000 in about a thousand locals in 1900, to 175,799 in over two thousand locals in 1913.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Canada, DBS, Canada Year Book, 1905, 1922-23 quoted in C. Lipton, The Trade Union Movement of Canada 1827-1959, NC Press, Toronto, 1973, p. 99.

⁴⁷ Canada, Department of Labour, Annual Report on Strikes and Lockouts, 1901-1916, 1956, quoted in C. Lipton, The Trade Union Movement of Canada 1827-1959, p. 99.

National politics during the period were dominated by the Liberal party which gained power in 1896 and remained in office until 1911. During their years of opposition the Liberals had been free traders and strongly critical of the Conservative high tariff policy. Designed to encourage manufacturing in Canada, the National Policy had won strong support from businessmen. Once in office the Liberals quickly abandoned their free trade policy and did little to change the tariff structure. When the government did propose a policy of limited reciprocity it was defeated in the election of 1911, in part, at least, because of its reciprocity policy.

However much it may have been heeding business interests, the Liberal government was not unmindful of labour's growing strength. An indication of labour's developing political consciousness was the election in 1900 of two independent labour M.P.s, Ralph Smith of Nanaimo and Arthur Puttee of Winnipeg. The Liberal government responded to this challenge from the left by establishing a Department of Labour which published a monthly labour gazette and offered conciliation services. Daniel O'Donoghue, a prominent trade unionist, was appointed fair wages officer to ensure that workers on

government contracts received wages commensurate to those paid in the private sector.⁴⁸ Sir William Mulock, Postmaster General and the minister responsible for these initiatives, addressed the Trades and Labour Congress convention of 1900 and received, according to the Globe, "a most complimentary welcome".⁴⁹ Laurier himself spoke to the convention and noted with pleasure the presence of labour representatives in the Commons.⁵⁰

These Liberal tactics were at least partly responsible for preventing the T.L.C.'s endorsing the formation of an independent labour party. Although a few delegates at the 1900 convention branded the Liberal actions as a "sop" to "put off" the workers, the majority felt that much had been accomplished by a government which dealt with labour questions "in a fair and non partisan spirit".⁵¹ The 1906 T.L.C. convention did authorize the

⁴⁸ R.H. Babcock, Gompers in Canada: a study in American continentalism before the First World War, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1974, p. 66.

⁴⁹ Toronto Globe, 24 Dec. 1900, as quoted in Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

establishment of a Canadian Labour Party which was to be organized on a provincial basis and to have a platform composed of the platform and principles of the T.L.C.⁵² The efforts achieved little success. In 1914 Alphonse Verville, M.P. for Maisonneuve, sat as labour's sole representative in the House of Commons.

The turn of the century saw the birth of Canadian socialism. The 1890s had seen a few attempts to establish socialist parties: most notable of these were the Socialist Labour Party, an offshoot of Daniel de Leon's radical Marxist Party in the United States, and the Canadian Socialist League founded in 1899 by G. Weston Wrigley who defined socialism as applied Christianity.⁵³ But it was not until 1901 with the founding of the Socialist Party of British Columbia that Canadian socialism can be said to have arrived. Formed from the remnants of the Canadian Socialist League, the Socialist Labour Party

⁵² See R. Babcock, Gompers in Canada, pp. 166-68; also M. Robin, Radical Politics and Organized Labour in Canada (1880-1930), Industrial Relations Centre, Queen's University, Kingston, 1968, pp. 81-83.

⁵³ M. Robin, Radical Politics and Organized Labour in Canada (1880-1930), pp. 32-34.

and the United Socialist Party,⁵⁴ the Party achieved almost immediate success. In the provincial election of 1903 two socialists, J.H. Hawthornthwaite of Nanaimo and P. Williams of Newcastle, were elected to the legislature. Along with William Davidson, an independent labour M.P. from Slocan, they held the balance of power in the 1904 session of the legislature and were able to force through a number of significant reforms.⁵⁵

At the request of a group of Manitoba socialists who attended the 1904 convention, the party changed its name to the Socialist Party of Canada.⁵⁶ Although the name changed and a number of locals sprang up in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and the Maritimes, the party never left the control of its B.C. wing. Not only was the national executive made up almost entirely of B.C. members,⁵⁷ but the party platform bore the imprint of B.C. radicalism.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

⁵⁵ Among them was an eight hour day for coal miners. Ibid., p. 43.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 43.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 100.

It refused to join the Second International. Despite the remarkable achievement of its members in the B.C. legislature it refused to endorse immediate demands. The party paper, the Western Clarion, once referred to the labour movement as "a stench in the nostrils of decency".⁵⁸

Not surprisingly, given its radical stance and the executive's isolation from the rest of Canada outside B.C., the party very quickly developed factions and split. In August 1909 the Toronto local was expelled because it voted to join the International.⁵⁹ At its May 1910 convention the Ontario wing voted to drop out of the party.⁶⁰ A year later a group of Ontario socialists formed the Canadian Socialist Federation. According to Cotton, the C.S.F. was formed because the actions of the Socialist

⁵⁸ The Western Clarion, 24 June 1905, quoted in Ibid, p. 94. David Bercuson argues persuasively that the conditions of work and living in the mining camps of British Columbia and the fact that the work force was largely immigrant were responsible for nurturing a radicalism more extreme than any found throughout the rest of Canada. D.J. Bercuson, "Labour Radicalism and the Western Industrial Frontier, 1897-1919", Canadian Historical Review, June 1977, pp. 154-175.

⁵⁹ M. Robin, Radical Politics and Organized Labour in Canada, 1880-1930, pp. 112-13.

⁶⁰ C.W., 16 June 1910, p. 1.

Party executive were arbitrary and the party was run undemocratically.⁶¹ But an examination of the new party's platform shows that the decision to form a new party was based on more substantial grounds. Unlike the Socialist Party, the C.S.F. decided to join the Second International. Furthermore, although it maintained the primacy of the proletarian revolution, it endorsed such immediate demands as the eight hour day, the abolition of child labour and universal adult suffrage.⁶² In December 1911 the C.S.F. joined the Manitoba Social-Democratic Party[#] to form the Social-Democratic Party of Canada.⁶³ The party's platform was identical to the one previously adopted by the C.S.F.

Although Cotton deplored the necessity of having to set up another socialist party - he believed that the

⁶¹ Ibid., 4 May 1911, p. 1.

⁶² Ibid.

[#] It had been formed in July 1910 by a group of dissidents who had left the Socialist Party because of its refusal to support immediate demands. E. Chisick, The Development of Winnipeg's Socialist Movement 1900-1915, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1972, p. 78.

⁶³ M. Robin, Radical Politics and Organized Labour in Canada, 1880-1930, p. 113.

split in the socialist movement would "confuse the minds of the workers"⁶⁴ - he supported the C.S.F. and later the Social-Democratic Party. He believed that it was essential to form a socialist party that was run democratically and not by its Dominion executive.⁶⁵ He chaired the founding convention of the C.S.F. and persuaded the delegates to make Cotton's Weekly the party paper.⁶⁶ After 1911 the paper supported the Social-Democratic Party.

Although the Social-Democratic Party never achieved any electoral success, by August 1914 it did have a membership of over 5,000 in 229 locals.⁶⁷ In 1914 the fortunes of the Socialist Party were at a low ebb. It had polled less than 5,000 votes in the B.C. election of 1912. Neither of the two socialists elected to the provincial legislature in 1901 was still in the party. Hawthornthwaite had been expelled for speculating in coal

⁶⁴ C.W., 4 May 1911, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ J.F. Cahan, A Survey of the Political Attitudes of the Ontario Labour Movement, 1850-1935, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1945, p. 30.

properties. Parker Williams had left to join the Liberals.⁶⁸ The party never again enjoyed the success it had achieved so quickly after its founding in 1900.

Despite Cotton's support of the C.S.F. and his probable participation in the founding of the Social-Democratic Party in late December 1911[#], Cotton always regretted the split in the Canadian socialist movement. He rarely discussed the split and never responded to the name calling which sometimes appeared in the Western Clarion, the official paper of the Socialist Party of Canada.⁺ In April 1913 Cotton issued a plea for the end

⁶⁸ M. Robin, Radical Politics and Organized Labour in Canada, 1880-1930, p. 99.

[#] The issues of Cotton's Weekly from January 3, 1912 to August 1, 1912 inclusive are missing. Thus there is no record in Cotton's Weekly of the founding convention of the Social-Democratic Party held in Port Arthur on December 30, 1911. Because Cotton participated in the founding convention of the C.S.F., it is reasonable to assume that he supported, even if he did not attend, the convention at which the C.S.F. joined the Manitoba Social Democratic Party to form the new party.

⁺ In the November 8, 1911 issue Cotton's Weekly was described as being "not much good for anything but sub-hunting". Cotton once reported that he had been attacked by W.C. Gribble, a Western Clarion contributor, as "... a dirty, lowdown sneaking cur, working for his own material interests." C.W., 14 Dec. 1911, p. 1.

of disunity. He argued that there were no longer any reasons preventing the reunion of the two factions. The executive of the Socialist Party which had acted so arbitrarily was no longer in office. He did not think it would be difficult to reach an agreement on a new location for party headquarters. Moreover, the issue of whether or not to support immediate demands was really not an issue at all. He quoted a section of the Socialist Party's platform which said that the party "would support legislation which would advance the interests of the working class and aid the workers in their class struggle against capitalism".⁶⁹ This was not significantly different from the Social-Democratic Party's position that "as a means of preparing the minds of the working class for the ... Co-operative Commonwealth, the Social-Democratic Party of Canada will support any measure that will tend to better conditions under capitalism".⁷⁰ The factions never did reunite.

⁶⁹ C.W., 10 Apr. 1913, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

When Karl Marx died in 1883 he left behind what one scholar has described as "a rich and ambiguous intellectual legacy".⁷¹ Various interpretations have been taken from his writings. An interpretation that found widespread support in the period 1890 to 1914 was provided by Karl Kautsky. The son of a Czech nationalist and a German mother, Karl Kautsky (1854-1938) became a socialist at the University of Vienna. In 1879 he joined the German Social-Democratic Party during the dark days of its exile and in 1883 founded Neue Zeit, the first German organ of theoretical Marxism since 1848. After Engels' death in 1895, Kautsky became the party's pre-eminent theoretician, a position he held during the lifetime of the Party.⁷² It was to Kautsky that Cotton looked for his understanding of Marx.

In 1892, the year after the German Social Democratic Party adopted the Erfurt program as its official platform, its chief architect, Karl Kautsky, wrote an

⁷¹ Sidney Hook, Marx and the Marxists, Van Nostrand Co. Inc., Princeton, 1955, p. 49.

⁷² C.E. Schorske, German Social Democracy 1905-1917, Harper Torch books, New York, 1971, p. 87.

elaboration of the program entitled The Glass Struggle. Kautsky's argument was that forces working within capitalist society assured its inevitable collapse. From the ruins of the capitalist order socialist society would emerge. This was the path of progress prescribed by evolutionary law.⁷³ The machine was the catalyst of change in capitalist society. Before the advent of the machine, each worker owned his own tools and produced sufficient for himself and his few customers. But the machine made handicraft and individual production obsolete. Affordable only by a few, the machine allowed the concentration of the means of production in relatively few hands. The propertyless workers became proletarians who worked in factories.⁷⁴ Concentration of the means of production was the most powerful force operating within the capitalist system. Faced with the recurring need to change machinery made obsolete by inventions and unable to obtain the credit available to his more well to do competitor, the small producer was forced into bankruptcy.⁷⁵

⁷³ Karl Kautsky, The Class Struggle, trans. W.E. Bohn, W.W. Norton and Co., New York, 1971, p. 87.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 62-63.

Thus the proletariat increased while the capitalist class diminished.

At this point the historic mission of capitalism which was to destroy small scale production and concentrate and improve the means of production was completed. "From a motive power of progress it (private ownership) has become a cause of social disintegration and bankruptcy."⁷⁶ The old capitalist maxim "a man's industry is his fortune" was reversed.⁷⁷ Where once private ownership had been a means for spurring society on to the highest development of its productive powers, it had become instead a means of compelling society more and more to waste its powers of production.⁷⁸ "Industrial crises follow one another with increasing rapidity and severity."⁷⁹ Victimized by the dislocations of capitalism, the proletariat would become more class conscious, militant and, finally, revolutionary. Eventually the proletariat would

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 87.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 87.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 71-81.

inherit the ruined capitalist economy and from it would emerge a socialist society where co-operation supplanted competition and production for use replaced production for profit.

In brief this was the ideology that Cotton used, as he put it, "to seek out the information, unravel the laws and make their hideousness apparent to men".⁸⁰ His task, as he saw it, was not to indoctrinate a set of political ideas but to open the workingman's eyes to the abuses he suffered in the capitalist society. It was to clarify and give form to the inchoate ideas the worker derived from his own experience. Cotton was convinced that, once the worker was aware of the root causes of his abuse, he would embrace socialism.⁸¹

Although a considerable amount of work has been done on the early socialist movement in Canada, nothing has been done on the ideas which informed those socialists.

⁸⁰ C.W., 14 July 1910, p. 3.

⁸¹ The worker who realizes his helpless condition ... will turn to socialism and study its doctrines and a great light will flood his brain. When a knowledge of socialism and what it stands for enters his heart he will be filled with the missionary zeal of the early Christians. Ibid., 1 July 1909, p. 1.

This thesis is the first attempt to fill that gap, a particularly significant one in so ideologically oriented a movement. Second, this thesis will add to the general view of the Canadian society in the pre World War I period. What is different about Cotton's viewpoint is that, while the period is usually seen as one of a growing, progressive capitalism, Cotton sees Canadian capitalism as a dying system. Finally, much has been said about the influence of British and American importance on Canadian socialism. What this thesis shows is that the ideas of William Cotton were strongly influenced by the socialist thought of Karl Kautsky, the German socialist.

CHAPTER II

THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION IN CANADA

In the early years of the twentieth century, before the outbreak of World War I, Canada experienced an industrial boom. Immigration, which had been less than 50,000 in 1901, was 190,000 in 1906 and over 400,000 in 1913.¹ Capital imports, which were \$11 million in 1905, \$218 million in 1908, increased to \$540 million in 1913.² By 1913 more than \$2 billion had been invested in the railways, more than half of which had been invested since 1900.³

1 W.T. Easterbrook and H.G.J. Aiken, Canadian Economic History, Macmillan, Toronto, 1961, p. 401.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

Despite his abhorrence of capitalism, Cotton was enthusiastic about the industrial boom. However, his reasons for welcoming it were not those of an entrepreneur who saw the possibilities for great personal wealth in Canadian development; nor was his enthusiasm the nationalism of Laurier who saw the boom as the sign that the twentieth century would belong to Canada. As a Marxist, his perspective was very different.

In the Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx wrote the following key idea.

The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of modern industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie produces, above all, is its own gravediggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.⁴

Cotton echoed this fundamental idea when he wrote, "Socialism is based on the revolution produced by the capitalist mode of production".⁵ He believed that the socialist society would arise out of the crucible of a

⁴ Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1967, pp. 93-94.

⁵ C.W., 8 Dec. 1910, p. 1.

fully developed capitalist society. "Fifteen years ago", he wrote, "Canadian socialism would have been laughed at. The vast majority who heard of Marxian ideas thought them foolish."⁶ With the boom, however, "vast factories are growing, railroads are flung across the country, immigrants enter by the tens of thousands".⁷ Canada was moving from the pastoral to the industrial stage. On the one hand were the big industrial and transportation combines which increasingly dominated the state; on the other was the developing labour movement.⁸ Nor could there be any identity of interest between the emerging classes. "The economic interests of the capitalist class make them struggle to keep control of the machinery of production; the economic interests of the workers make them struggle to get control."⁹

The most powerful agent of change was the machine. The Industrial Revolution had forced men to abandon the

6 Ibid., 12 May 1910, p. 1.

7 Ibid., 15 Oct. 1910, p. 1.

8 Ibid., 12 May 1910, p. 1.

9 Ibid., 16 June 1910, p. 1.

specialized, individual labour of the crafts and had brought them together in the factories where the spirit of individualism was destroyed by the necessity of co-operation in factory work.¹⁰ The machine's power to transform the nature of human labour was evident in the Taylor system[#] which stated that it was possible to determine, then prescribe, the exact number of movements needed to complete each task, e.g., brick laying, shovelling, plastering. Cotton argued that, if human tasks could be so described, it was only a matter of time before such tasks would be done by machines. Thus, the Taylor system helped increase the disenchantment of the proletariat by developing a method which eventually led to men losing their jobs.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., 29 June 1911, p. 2.

[#] Frederick Winslow Taylor (1865 - 1915), an American engineer, was the first man to develop time motion studies. He became a consulting engineer in management for many industrial plants. Encyclopedia Britannica, William Benton, Chicago, 1969, p. 732.

¹¹ C.W., 8 June 1911, p. 4. This time-motion theory, about the most dehumanizing process it is possible to imagine, did not disturb Cotton as it has, subsequently, thinkers like Jacques Ellul (The Technological Society, Vintage, N.Y. 1964). Cotton thought that time-motion was a transitory state of labour and that with automation and the eventual socialist revolution, man would emancipate himself from the machine, not, as Ellul argues, become increasingly subservient to it.

Cotton took a certain delight in bringing new inventions to the attention of his readers. "The Edison Co. in Schenectady, New York has installed a screw making machine that does the work of sixty skilled mechanics,"¹² he wrote in October 1910. In January 1911, he reported that the telephone companies were installing a new line which permitted several conversations to go on simultaneously over one line.¹³ Trackless street cars,¹⁴ a cement gun which did the work of 24 men,¹⁵ automatic stores¹⁶ (strong overtones, here, of Bellamy's Looking Backward), a track snow scraper,¹⁷ and, what must have been the definitive all purpose machine before 1914, a combination plow, spreader, flanger and bank builder used for railroad construction¹⁸ were only some of the inventions described in Cotton's Weekly.

12 Ibid., 20 Oct. 1910, p. 1.

13 Ibid., 19 Jan. 1911, p. 4.

14 Ibid., 22 Dec. 1910, p. 1.

15 Ibid., 1 June 1911, p. 4.

16 Ibid., 30 Mar. 1911, p. 1.

17 Ibid., 24 Feb. 1910, p. 1.

18 Ibid., 9 Mar. 1911, p. 1.

Thus, the cumulative effect of the Industrial Revolution was, first, to socialize the workers, second to mechanize them and finally to replace them with machines. This process, despite short term hardship, was a happy one in Cotton's eyes, for it meant that a body of class conscious unemployed men would grow and "bring Socialism that much nearer".¹⁹

However, the most important effect of industrialization was to intensify the class struggle. Cotton readily admitted that, in the early days of Canadian capitalism, it was difficult to identify the class struggle. It was "tempered by conciliation acts and cheap land".²⁰ But the steam engine, modern machinery, railroads, steamships, forces which had created bourgeois society "are now already ... working towards its ruin and ultimate destruction".²¹ Canada had now reached a point where she would be "troubled with the diseases of decadent capitalism, failing markets, unemployment, poverty and general rotteness".²² Thus

19 Ibid., 19 Jan. 1911, p. 4.

20 Ibid., 1 July 1909, p. 2.

21 Ibid., 8 Dec. 1910, p. 1.

22 Ibid., 21 Apr. 1910, p. 1.

Cotton never doubted that the class struggle would develop, and as it did, the whole bourgeois nature of society, particularly of politics, would become apparent.

Cotton believed that the ultimate transition from capitalism to socialism would come as a result of economic crises caused by overproduction. Despite capitalism's apparent success at staving off the crises of overproduction through the extravagance of the plutocracy, the waste of militarism and investment in foreign countries, eventually all markets would be glutted. "Socialism will come with the failure of the markets",²³ he concluded.

Thus economic forces would create a disenchanted proletariat ready to capture the institutions of power in the bourgeois society. The capture of power was the actual revolution. Cotton defined it as "the rise of a hitherto subject class to political and economic power".²⁴ Although his definition left the problem of whether the revolution would be peaceful or violent unresolved, Cotton did try to come to terms with the issue.

²³ Ibid., 2 Sept. 1909, p. 1.

²⁴ Ibid., 30 Dec. 1909, p. 1.

Karl Kautsky believed that the revolution would be achieved peacefully, by democratic means. He prophesied that the parliamentary system, which was declining under capitalism, would be "reawakened to new youth and strength when it, together with the total governmental power, is conquered by the rising proletariat and turned to serve its purposes".²⁵ His resolution, that a conquest of public power could not succeed as a coup de main but would have to come as the gradual conquest of municipalities and legislative assemblies, was passed at the Paris Congress of the International in 1900.²⁶ Alfred Mayer later described Kautsky's concept of revolution as "tame and civilized".²⁷

There is plenty of evidence to show that Cotton shared Kautsky's optimistic belief in a peaceful revolution. Although all previous revolutions had been violent, men had not had recourse to the ballot box. "Napoleon declared that God was on the side of the big battalions.

²⁵ Kautsky, The Social Revolution, pp. 79-82, quoted in Robert Tucker, The Marxian Revolutionary Idea, W.W. Norton and Co., New York, 1969, p. 194.

²⁶ C.W., 29 June 1911, p. 4.

²⁷ Alfred Mayer, Marxism: The Unity of Theory and Practice, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1953, p. 135.

The ballot box is a modern device by which the side with the biggest battalions can be decided without an armed conflict."²⁸ He said that the present constitution gave socialists sufficient scope for revolutionary activity.²⁹ Furthermore, he believed the capitalists feared a democratic revolution. "Troops can cope with rebellion. But troops cannot cope with the legislative will of the majority when free political institutions exist."³⁰ He urged the workers to be political. "Capture ... Ottawa and let the workers legislate into existence the conditions for which they now strike. If the workers will waken to politics they will have found the surest way of getting what they want."³¹

However, Cotton's optimism was by no means unqualified. A democratic revolution was possible only as long as democratic procedures were respected by the ruling class. In fact, whether the revolution would be

28 C.W., 30 Dec. 1909, p. 1.

29 Ibid., 8 June 1911, p. 4.

30 Ibid., 23 June 1910, p. 1.

31 Ibid., 31 Mar. 1910, p. 3.

peaceful or violent would depend on the response of the bourgeoisie to the increasing strength of the socialists. If the bourgeoisie abided by the will of the majority, there would be no violence.³²

But if the change cannot be brought about by constitutional means when a majority wants a change, then force must be used. For when the minority appeal to force to defeat the will of the majority, then the majority must appeal to force also in order that the will of the people may be carried out.³³

Cotton's chief concern was that the ruling class would alter election procedures to forestall a socialist victory.

If ... the vote is taken away by gerrymandering, by crooked election methods, by property qualifications, all of which are used in the USA to defeat the will of the people, then the solution of capitalist decadence will have to be by force.³⁴

³² Ibid., 2 June 1919, p. 3.

³³ Ibid., 8 June 1911, p. 4.

³⁴ Ibid., 2 Dec. 1909, p. 1.

Cotton was at his weakest when discussing the constitutional problems of completing the socialist revolution. Only once did he refer to the British North America Act. He claimed it was "not elastic enough to introduce the Socialist state",³⁵ but he offered no explanation of what he meant. He referred to "powerful interests behind the B.N.A. Act which thwarted the interests of the people at large",³⁶ but he never identified them nor did he explain how they used the Act to their advantage. He concluded by writing that the act "would have to be thrown on the scrap heap before the Socialist state can be introduced. The will of the people must not be defeated by a document written by hands long dead."³⁷

Given the weakness of the socialist movement in Canada at the time Cotton was writing, his prediction of a democratic socialist revolution in Canada and his fears that the bourgeoisie might thwart the revolution

35 Ibid., 30 Dec. 1909, p. 1.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

by crooked means might seem far fetched. It was one thing for Kautsky to forecast a peaceful revolution in Germany where the Social-Democratic Party was one of the largest in the Reichstag[#] and quite another for Cotton to talk about the same thing in Canada where the socialist movement was small and divided and had no representatives in Parliament. But before any final assessment can be made of Cotton's attitude towards revolution, it is only fair to discuss the circumstances in which he discussed it and to point out his conception of his own role in preparing the way for the final revolution.

In those countries where industrial development was far more advanced than Canada, (where, Cotton frequently reminded his readers, industrial development was at a very primitive stage), socialist movements were strong. He cited Western European countries, especially Germany, and also the U.S.A. where the socialist movement was more fragmented. Given the experience of the more industrialized countries, Cotton made the not unreasonable

[#] In the 1912 German election the Social-Democratic Party won 35% of the total vote and 110 seats. B. Tuchman, The Proud Tower, Bantam, New York, 1967, p. 534.

prediction that the socialist movement in Canada would grow as the industrial sector developed. Cotton did not believe that the socialist revolution would occur in the near future. A successful revolution was inconceivable before its time was due. A socialist revolution would come only when the capitalist economy was fully developed. He saw his job as showing the workers that capitalism was a temporary, if necessary, phenomenon and that history was moving in a direction that allowed the workers to play an active role in their own emancipation.

CHAPTER III

THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Cotton belonged to a group of critics, which included R.C. Henders of the Grain Growers' Association and Henri Bourassa, who believed that the party system was inimical to democratic government in Canada. However, Cotton differed from other members of this group in his acceptance of the concept of government found in the Communist Manifesto, where it was written, "The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie".¹ Echoing Marx and Engels, Cotton called politics "the reflex of the economic needs of the bourgeoisie"² and accepted this

p. 82. ¹ K. Marx and F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto,

² C.W., 18 May 1911, p. 2.

dictum as the key to understanding Canadian government.

The Canadian state was headed by the Crown which, in Cotton's estimation, was simply a relic of English history retained by the bourgeoisie because it fulfilled the purpose of encouraging waste consumption. "He (Edward) was a decoy duck to tempt the parasite capitalist class to become extravagant, luxurious and whimsical."³ Horse racing served to waste the product of labour and keep the workers busy at the pleasures of the parasites.⁴ Cotton discounted as false emotion the mourning of the people for Edward VII who died in May 1910. Such mourning had meaning when people were genuinely fearful that a tyrant might succeed a good king; in the time of constitutional monarchy such emotion was nonsense.⁵

Cotton wrote that the Governor-General was simply "an errand boy of the exploiting capitalists"⁶ who was expected to be vociferous in his support of the army and

³ Ibid., 19 May 1912, p. 1.

⁴ Ibid., Whether they were busy attending to the needs of the horse racing bourgeois or busy following their example, Cotton did not say. The latter as much as the former can fit quite comfortably into Marxist ideology.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 15 Dec. 1910, p. 1.

navy. His chief function was to hold semi-royal court at Rideau Hall where the daughters of successful capitalists gathered to spend the money "their papas had received from the unpaid labour of the workers".⁷ When Grey returned to England in 1910, Cotton asked sarcastically whether Kier Hardie or Will Thorne would be considered for the job. However, he concluded by admitting that there was little point in campaigning for a republic to replace a constitutional monarchy when far more radical change was needed.⁸

The other institution which Cotton discussed was Parliament made up of both the Senate and the House of Commons. Cotton believed that the Senate reflected the bourgeois hold on the Canadian state. While the qualifications of a senator ruled out any possibility of a working man becoming one,⁹ the Senate included in its ranks men prominent in banking and business. Senator Melvin Jones was President of Massey-Harris and a director of Nova Scotia Steel and Coal; Senator George Cox was

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 12 May 1910, p. 4.

9 Ibid., 14 Apr. 1910, p. 1.

President of Canada Life Assurance, a director of National Trust and of Canadian General Electric; Senator Edwards was a director of the Bank of Commerce; Senator Gibson was a director of the Bank of Hamilton; Senator Robert Mackay was a director of the Bank of Montreal; Senator Robert Jaffray was Vice-President of the Imperial Bank of Canada,¹⁰ and so Cotton's list went on.

Cotton was hesitant to argue that the Senate had much power. Rather, he believed that the Senate was not much more than an instrument of party patronage and that Senate appointments simply revealed the bourgeois bias of governments. He noted that the opposition party invariably criticized the Senate and vowed to reform it. But once in office, the party succumbed to the temptations of patronage and left the Senate unreformed. "Borden calls for reform now. But kindly death will leave Senate seats vacant and Borden, too, will drop his reform schemes for the Senate."¹¹

But naturally the focus of Cotton's attention was the House of Commons. There he found everything

¹⁰ Ibid., 20 Oct. 1910, p. 1.

¹¹ Ibid., 15 Dec. 1910, p. 1.

weighted in favour of the bourgeoisie. Deposits made it extremely difficult for a new party to enter candidates in an election unless it had large financial resources. If a party were to have entered candidates in all 221 constituencies it would have meant raising \$44,200 deposit money. "Imagine the Socialist Party raising that sum from the exploited slave."¹² Therefore, the only "right" the worker had was a chance every four or five years to decide which of two men "will have the chance to make the laws under which labour is plundered".¹³

The representative system of government did not mean that the people ruled themselves, Cotton contended, but rather that the members of parliament ruled the people.¹⁴ Once elected, the M.P. could vote exactly as he pleased. Moreover, in the Party system he was expected to follow the leader's policy rather than heed the desires of his constituents. Without the power of initiative, referendum or recall, the people were virtually powerless

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 17 Mar. 1910, p. 1.

¹⁴ Ibid., 15 Dec. 1910, p. 1.

to exercise their authority.¹⁵

Cotton saw scarcely any difference between the two major parties. Both were composed of a variety of types - "honest men, intelligent men, fools, rogues, self-seekers"¹⁶ - all aspiring to attain office, ostensibly for the good of Canada, but in fact to secure the political and financial advancement of their political adherents.¹⁷ In fact, the Liberals and Conservatives were nothing more than "the two halves of the capitalist party".¹⁸ While members of both parties posed as statesmen, the most serious charge one party ever levelled at the other was incompetence.¹⁹ The guiding principle they shared in common was to gain office and have the chance of doing the work of the capitalists and so enjoy the rewards of office.²⁰ Borden, as much as Laurier, "bowed meekly before the throne of capitalism."²¹

15 Ibid., 17 Nov. 1910, p. 1.

16 Ibid., 7 Jan. 1909, p. 1.

17 Ibid., 7 Apr. 1910, p. 1.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 7 Jan. 1909, p. 1.

20 Ibid., 6 Oct. 1910, p. 4.

21 Ibid.

Cotton believed that the bourgeoisie was able to use Parliament to its own advantage because the workers were ignorant and undisciplined. In the last analysis the power of the bosses did not rest on coercion which would have been useless in the face of an aroused working class. Rather,

Their power is based upon your ignorance - upon the fact that a few honeyed phrases from the lips of their lackeys are sufficient to satisfy you. So long as you listen to the lackeys chant of "identity of interests" and "the dignity of labour" - just so long they will hold you down and skin you of everything.²²

Cotton's task, as he saw it, was to educate the workers, to make them aware of the inequities of the capitalist system and to encourage the development of a class consciousness.

My work is to seek out the information, unravel the laws and make their hideousness apparent to men. There are exposures innumerable and the inconsistencies of the capitalist system to be held up to the light of day to be laughed at and scorned by men ... There are slaves in the mines, mills, workshops and on the farms to be leavened with the leaven of social discontent.²³

22 Ibid., 31 Mar. 1910, p. 3.

23 Ibid., 14 July 1910, p. 3.

Cotton found the education of the workers a trying process. He quoted George Edward, a Montreal socialist, who, after speaking to the strikers at Canadian Car and Foundry, told Cotton that the men were like children. "They know practically nothing of what keeps them down and our philosophy is a revelation to them."²⁴ The workers were constantly diverted from their real interests by their inbred, misguided respect for their bosses,²⁵ by the preachings of their priests and ministers and by politicians.²⁶ Cotton's disgust for the workers reached its peak when he wrote of their voting record in Canadian elections. "You would not elect bosses or lawyers to be your union officials. Yet you elect your bosses and lawyers to Parliament."²⁷ The workers had voted for Macdonald and Laurier and "when the plute papers tell the voting plugs that Laurier is no good and that Borden is the man, the voting cattle will go and vote for

24 Ibid., 22 June 1911, p. 2.

25 Ibid., 28 Oct. 1909, p. 1.

26 Ibid., 16 Sept. 1909, p. 1.

27 Ibid., 2 Feb. 1911, p. 4.

Borden".²⁸ And finally in what must have been a mood of deepest frustration he wrote

The worker is obedient to the command of the politician who owns him. Just as a cow likes to have handed her a particular juicy handful of long grass when she is to be captured and led to the slaughter house, so the common voting mutt likes to be handed a little of the long green when he is to be led to the slaughter house of all his economic interests.²⁹

In this way Cotton expressed his exasperation at the failure of socialist candidates to win substantial working class support at the polls. It was patently unfair to blame the workers for socialism's failure. As Cotton admitted elsewhere,³⁰ the Canadian industrial economy was still primitive and it was simply too soon to expect a developed working class consciousness. Moreover, by the 1911 election, the socialists were so fragmented - there were three socialist parties in existence in the last six months of 1911 - that even those workers who wanted to vote for a socialist must have been puzzled by the variety of parties offering socialist candidates.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 9 Feb. 1911, p. 1.

³⁰ Ibid., 9 Mar. 1911, p. 4.

Despite his despair, Cotton believed that it was essential for socialists to take part in elections.

We socialists believe in political action. The method of exercising our political rights in a constitutional country like Canada is the election of candidates to represent us in the parliament and legislatures of Canada in order to enact into law the principles for which we stand.³¹

In the 1911 election Cotton ran as a declared socialist in St. Lawrence, a working class constituency with a large Jewish population in the eastern part of Montreal. He realized that the disorganized state of the socialist movement in Canada made a national campaign impossible. Still, he believed that socialists should not pass up the opportunity of spreading socialism and educating the working class. He said that he was working on a scheme to organize socialists for a more effective campaign in the next election.³² He never said what it was.

In the August 31st issue he published "The Manifesto of the Socialist candidate for St. Lawrence division". In the first part of the Manifesto he attacked

³¹ Ibid., 23 Jan. 1913, p. 1.

³² Ibid., 3 Aug. 1911, p. 1.

the Liberals and Conservatives, accusing them of being nothing more than servants of the corporate magnates. He gently admonished the constituents. "You presumed they (Liberals and Conservatives) would look after your interests. You know the result. Your economic condition has gone from bad to worse. Your wages will not allow you to live the life a human being is entitled to."³³ He then asked rhetorically, "Is it not time that you made a change and put a party into office that stands on the side of the people and is opposed to money power?"³⁴ The last third of the Manifesto was devoted to outlining his platform. It called for the democratic ownership and management of industry, production of the necessities of life for use, not profit, and the right to work. The final item enjoined that "no one except the weak, the sick and infants shall live by the work of others".³⁵ Cotton finished third, behind the Liberal and Conservative candidates, with 365 votes, over three times the number of

³³ Ibid., 31 Aug. 1911, p. 4.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

votes won by the socialist candidate in the previous federal election.³⁶

Therefore, in spite of his belief that Parliament and the provincial legislatures were simply handmaidens of bourgeois interests, Cotton enthusiastically supported and participated in elections. He did so for two reasons. His stated purpose in publishing Cotton's Weekly was to help develop a strong class consciousness among the workers. Elections offered excellent opportunities to attract the attention of the workers to socialism. "Our agitation will win point and vigor and far more attention if we have candidates in the field."³⁷ Second, his refusal to support the electoral process would have meant implicit support of a violent overthrow of the capitalist system. As shown in the previous chapter, Cotton believed that the transition from capitalism to socialism could be accomplished peacefully through the existing democratic institutions. This belief demanded socialist participation in elections.

³⁶ Ibid., 5 Oct. 1911, p. 1.

³⁷ Ibid., 23 Jan. 1913, p. 1.

CHAPTER IV

NATIONALIZATION AND REFORM

Nationalization and reform, particularly the latter, were two issues that attracted a good deal of Cotton's attention. Both were attractive to those who wished to see changes in the capitalist system that would benefit the working classes. What Cotton attempted to do was to inform his readers as to what the socialist position was on each of these issues.

I

Between 1900 and 1914 the principle of public ownership of certain enterprises had become well established in various parts of Canada. In Western Canada provincial governments were giving strong financial backing

to farmer run grain elevators.¹ In Ontario some municipal leaders fought hard to convince the provincial government to establish a commission which would, in the words of Alderman F. S. Spence of Toronto, "... arrange for the transmission of electricity to the various municipalities desiring it ... preventing in this way the power from falling into the hands of any monopoly ...".² In 1908 the Conservative government of James Whitney established the Hydro-Electric Commission whose responsibility was to construct and maintain transmission lines.³

In his pamphlet Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, written in 1877, Friedrich Engels devoted a paragraph to the nationalization issue. He argued that since the state was nothing more than a "capitalist machine" the workers in a nationalized industry remained wage workers. The more industries the state succeeded in taking over, he continued, "the more does it actually become the national capitalist,

1 R.C. Brown and R. Cook, Canada, 1896-1921, p. 155.

2 Merrill Denison, The People's Power: The History of Ontario Hydro, (Toronto, 1960), 27-28, as quoted in Ibid p. 105.

3 R.C. Brown and R. Cook, Canada, 1896-1921, p. 100.

the more citizens it does exploit. ... The capitalist relation is not done away with. It is rather brought to a head."⁴ The German Socialist leader, Wilhelm Liebknecht, announced his opposition to nationalization at a Party Congress in Berlin in 1892. To Liebknecht state control was no better than private control because state socialism was in fact state capitalism. The oppression of the worker was not relieved.⁵

Cotton's position was essentially Engels' and Liebknecht's. "State capitalism is not socialism", he wrote. "State capitalism is the exploitation of the wage slaves by the government. That government by its present composition belongs to the parasites."⁶ Cotton maintained that the principle which led governments to nationalization in Canada was unprofitability. Profitable industries were owned by private interests; unprofitable industries were taken over and run by the state, as Cotton sarcastically

⁴ F. Engels, SOCIALISM: UTOPIAN AND SCIENTIFIC in A. P. Mendel (ed.) ESSENTIAL WORKS OF MARXISM, Bantam, New York, 1961, p. 76.

⁵ G.D.H. Cole, A HISTORY OF SOCIALIST THOUGHT, V. III, Pt. 1, THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL, 1889-1914, Macmillan, New York, 1967, p. 275.

⁶ C.W., 21 Apr. 1910, p. 1.

put it, "in the interests of the people".⁷ If there was a good prospect that a new railroad line would show a profit, the Canadian government gave the franchise "to a group of dividend-hungry men and guaranteed their bonds. If a railroad will not pay, then Canada builds it."⁸ The Grand Trunk Pacific had been given the rights to "the fertile West" while the government had built the Intercolonial into the barren rocky East where the prospect of profit was slim. Cheaper passenger and freight rates on the government railway did not benefit the worker who had neither the money to travel nor the freight to ship. In effect the cheap rates were a form of government subsidies for the capitalists.⁹

There was a danger, too, that state run enterprises could be used for purposes inimical to worker interests. No doubt Cotton agreed with a long report which appeared in the September 27, 1910 issue of Cotton's

7 Ibid., 17 Feb. 1910, p. 1.

8 Ibid., 7 May 1909, p. 1.

9 Ibid., 3 Mar. 1910, p. 2.

Weekly. In it Robert Hunter, an American socialist, explained how the state owned Belgian railroad, while ostensibly benefiting the workers, actually protected capitalist interests. The rates were very low, especially for those who purchased an annual pass which allowed a passenger to travel as much as 30 miles to and from work for a weekly rate of 40¢. The low travel fare meant that the area from which a capitalist could draw his labour force was greatly extended. He could recruit labour from rural areas where workers had their own gardens and could compete at an unfair advantage with the urban workers who were compelled to buy their food. Furthermore, when a labour force was so far flung it was very difficult to organize unions.

The report concluded:

The fact is that the state owned railroad of Belgium with its cheap transit rates explains in part at least why the wages in Belgium are the lowest in Europe and the trade unions the weakest.¹⁰

¹⁰ R. Hunter, Ibid., 22 Sept. 1910, p. 2.

Cotton did not believe that the transfer of industries from private to public control was necessarily radical. After all, the test of a socialist industry was that it was owned by the people and run democratically.¹¹ A nationalized industry in a bourgeois society was owned, not by the people, but by the state which was an instrument of capitalist interests. In effect nationalization meant no change at all.

II

The reform issue posed a dilemma for socialists. If socialists supported reforms that secured improvements for the workers their support might well have encouraged workers to believe that it was possible to achieve their demands within the capitalist system, thus obviating the need for a socialist revolution. On the other hand, opposition to reforms meant that the socialists risked losing the support of the workers without whom, of course,

¹¹ C. W., 16 Oct. 1911, p. 4.

the socialist revolution was inconceivable. In his book, The Class Struggle, Kautsky developed a position on reforms that attempted to resolve the dilemma. He defined social reforms as the efforts made by the possessing classes to prevent the downfall of the system of private property.

Social reform is the name they give to their perpetual tinkering with the industrial mechanism for the sake of removing this or that ill effect of private property ¹² without touching private property itself.

However, simply because reforms were granted by the owners to maintain their class supremacy did not mean that the workers should refuse them and bear all the ill treatment of the capitalist system until the revolution came. On the contrary, through trade union and political activities workers in all civilized countries had shown success in obtaining such reforms as higher wages, shorter hours and the prohibition of child labour. But the important point was that, far from slowing the pace of revolutionary development, reforms actually quickened it. An owner, forced to raise wages, might introduce new machinery, or a small capitalist, having to increase his payroll, might be forced

12 K. Kautsky, The Class Struggle, p. 89.

out of business thus hastening the concentration of capital. Thus "... Reforms may be supported from the revolutionary stand point because ... so far from doing away with the suicidal tendencies of the capitalist system, they rather strengthen them".¹³

Cotton's approach to the issue of reform was not nearly so confident as Kautsky's nor was he able to resolve the problems that the issue posed for socialism as neatly as Kautsky had done in The Class Struggle. But the reform issue loomed large for Canadian socialists and Cotton did attempt to come to terms with it.

In the early years of its existence the Socialist Party of British Columbia had achieved a remarkable record in securing reform legislation. Two party members, J. H. Hawthornthwaite and Parker Williams, won seats in the legislature in the 1903 election. Along with the support of a William Davidson of Slocan the two socialists held the balance of power in the 1903 session and were able to extract a number of concessions, including amendments to

¹³ Ibid., p. 93.

the Coal Mines Regulations Act, a Boiler Inspector Law, Settlers' Rights Act and the Eight Hour Law in the coal mines.¹⁴

Despite this remarkable record the Socialist Party, far from endorsing the principle of reform, openly disparaged it. The party believed that reforms "diverted working men from the true cause of revolution".¹⁵ The party paper, The Western Clarion, attacked the trade unions as the chief villains of reformist tendencies and vilified them as "ridiculous commodity combinations which diverted the working class from attacking the capitalists in the very citadel of their power".¹⁶

Cotton deplored the stand of the Socialist Party. "Its M.P.s support reform in the legislature but the Socialist Party sneers at them."¹⁷ He cited the Socialist Party's stand as a major reason for a number of eastern socialists, including himself, breaking with the party to

¹⁴ Martin Robin, Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, (1880-1930), p. 43.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ C.W., 4 May 1911, p. 1.

form the Canadian Socialist Federation in April 1911. The C.S.F., and later the Social-Democratic Party of Canada, supported such reforms as the eight hour day, universal adult suffrage, and the initiative, referendum and recall.

But while he endorsed the principle of reform, Cotton by no means supported all reform measures and the men who sponsored them. That this was so was clearly evident in his discussion of Mackenzie King and the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act.

When individuals were mentioned in Cotton's Weekly they were portrayed in one dimensional terms as the spokesmen or instruments of their class. Thus, Laurier was a charming tool of the capitalists and Borden a cold one.¹⁸ Postmaster-General Lemieux was the capitalist lackey whose job was to destroy the socialist press,¹⁹ Sir Frederick Borden was "the head slaughter man of the Canadian army".²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid., 26 Jan. 1911, p. 1.

¹⁹ Ibid., 2 Feb. 1911, p. 1.

²⁰ Ibid., 18 Aug. 1910, p. 1.

Mackenzie King, however, was not so easily dismissed as a class-conscious stereotype. As Deputy Minister of Labour from 1900 to 1908, then first minister of the new Department of Labour from 1909 to 1911, he was an important figure in the Laurier administration. By all odds, Cotton believed, he should have been a socialist. He was the grandson of the Upper Canadian revolutionary who had fought for responsible government and of whom, Cotton had no doubt, King was very proud. There was revolutionary blood in his veins.²¹ Cotton quoted from a speech King had given at Woodstock on March 9, 1911 in which he had recognized a fundamental socialist idea in saying that nature and labour were the only sources of wealth.²² That he was capable of compassion for the workers was evident in a speech, given in the House, in which he evinced sympathy for the worker forced to rise at 5 a.m. to be at work at 7.²³

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 23 Mar. 1911, p. 1.

²³ Ibid.

Yet it was King who had been chiefly responsible for the unjust settlement of the Grand Trunk Railway Strike of 1910 when all employees had lost their accumulated pensions and many had lost their jobs.²⁴ Although he had been praised by the capitalist press for his peace making role, in fact all he had done was to end a strike troublesome to the railway by getting the strikers "to bend their necks to the yoke of the masters in peace and meekness".²⁵ His actions and association with the Laurier government belied his revolutionary ancestry and his rhetoric of sympathy for the working class. His function as Minister of Labour was not to secure justice for the workers but to make the capitalist exploitation of the wage slaves more efficient.²⁶ As much as he might want to, he could not escape the title of "government inspector of the slave pens".²⁷ His grandfather, who had fought for liberty against soldiers, "would turn in his grave did he know that

²⁴ Ibid., 18 Aug. 1910, p. 1.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 2 Sept. 1910, p. 1.

²⁷ Ibid., 18 Aug. 1910, p. 1.

his grandchild stood with the plunderers of Canada".²⁸

One reason for Cotton's skepticism about King's sympathy for the working class was King's authorship of the government's Industrial Disputes Investigation Act of 1907. In 1903 Parliament had passed the Railway Disputes Act which allowed the government to take the initiative in appointing a tripartite conciliation board. The act was invoked only once and produced a settlement. The government's decision to introduce a stronger conciliation bill was prompted by a bitter strike in the Alberta coal fields in 1906. While both sides refused to compromise, the farmers of Alberta were left with virtually no fuel to fight the early winter cold of 1906. Finally, public pressure forced the sides to reach an agreement and convinced the Laurier government that more effective means of strike settlement were needed.²⁹

In the early months of 1907 Parliament passed the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act. Although the Act was guided through the House by Rodolphe Lemieux, it had

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ R. Brown and R. Cook, Canada, 1896-1921, p. 121

been prepared by the Deputy Minister of Labour, Mackenzie King.³⁰ It stipulated that strikes in mines and public utilities were illegal until conciliation efforts had failed over a period of thirty days. It provided for a conciliation board of three, management and labour to choose one member each, the third, the chairman, to be chosen by mutual agreement of the other two. The board was empowered to subpoena witnesses, compel production of documents and take evidence under oath. If it achieved a settlement it submitted a report; if it failed, it submitted minority and majority accounts.³¹

Implicit in the Act were some of the tenets of liberalism. Impartial investigation, rational discourse, compromise in the spirit of freedom and respect for the other's position would result in agreements that were mutually satisfactory. Evil was essentially the result of ignorance and confusion; good was the inevitable result of the rational discourse of informed men. King wrote later

30 Ibid.

31 R.M. Dawson, William Lyon Mackenzie King, (1874-1923), University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1958, pp. 135-136.

in INDUSTRY AND HUMANITY on the merits of investigation in ending industrial disputes.

Investigation is a letting in of light. It does not attempt to award punishments or fix blame; it aims simply at disclosing facts ... Its use is a high tribute to human nature, for it assumes that collective opinion will approve the right and condemn the wrong. Willingness to investigate is prima facie evidence of a consciousness of right. In the absence of good and sufficient reasons, refusal to permit investigation is equally prima facie evidence of weakness or wrong ... The statutory right to investigate disputes ... has been found sufficient to influence parties to industrial differences to settle their controversies both voluntarily and speedily.³²

The assumption King made was that, once the information was known, reasonable men would act on it to arrive at an equitable solution. Cotton, on the other hand, believed that class interest, not pure reason, would determine the employer's reaction. Contrary to encouraging fair settlements, what the bill did was provide machinery whereby justice would seem to be done but where, in fact, the labourers "could be skinned with an appearance of fairness

³² W.L.M. King, Industry and Humanity, (1st ed.), p. 210-211, quoted by R. MacGregor Dawson, William Lyon Mackenzie King, (1874-1923), p. 136.

and morality".³³ The real intent of the act was to ensure that the profits of the capitalist system were increased, not to guarantee justice to the workers. At best, the act allowed the government to interfere in industries which paid so little that workers were unable to maintain efficient output.

Perhaps the boss was an ignorant exploiter not knowing how to give his men enough wages to supply them with sufficient fodder ... There are employers who consider it policy to starve their employees.³⁴

Cotton warned that no worker should be fooled into thinking that the act had been passed for his benefit.³⁵ The act only applied to those who worked in public utilities and mines where wages were relatively high. It made no provision for workers in the sweated industries and retail trade where wages were far lower.³⁶ The thirty day conciliation rule favoured the bosses at the expense of the workers. During conciliation management could sack workers

³³ C. W., 9 Sept. 1909, p. 1.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 9 Dec. 1909, p. 1.

³⁶ Ibid., 9 Sept. 1909, p. 1.

and close down factories or mines, but the workers could not strike.³⁷ Management could use the time to stock up inventory³⁸ and make arrangements for strike breakers.³⁹ Moreover, the thirty day rule prevented the workers from striking at a time when they were sufficiently aroused to do so.

In the beginning the act enjoyed a measure of success. It was accepted by the T.L.C. at its 1907 convention.⁴⁰ It also produced a number of settlements. Among them was a conciliation board settlement of a dispute between the Grand Trunk Railroad and its machinists after only three days of meetings in May 1907.⁴¹ Cotton wrote that the apparent success of the act indicated the primitive nature of Canadian capitalism. The worker had failed to become fully class conscious because it was possible to escape the misery of proletarian life by moving West and

37 Ibid., 8 July 1909, p. 1.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., 9 Sept. 1909, p. 1.

40 H.A. Logan, The History of Trade Union Organization in Canada, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1928, p. 219.

41 B.M. Selekman, Postponing Strikes: A Study of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act of Canada, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1927, p. 105.

opening a farm. When the escape was closed the worker would become class conscious and attack such bourgeois frauds as the I.D.I.A.⁴²

Cotton's opposition to the I.D.I.A. stood in marked contrast to his enthusiastic response to the Eight Hour Day bill which was introduced to the House of Commons in May 1909 by Alphonse Verville, an independent labour M.P. representing Maisonneuve. The bill provided for an eight hour day for government employees and stipulated that government contracts would go only to those employers willing to accept the eight hour day provision. Cotton urged his readers to write their M.P.s demanding their support for the bill. To prove that the capitalists were prepared to fight the bill, Cotton gave page one space to a letter which he claimed had been written to the membership of the Canadian Manufacturers Association by its secretary, G.M. Murray, on 5th March 1907.

⁴² C. W., 9 Sept. 1909, p. 1.

The excerpt read:

The Association needs your assistance. It feels that it has earned your support. Its successful campaign against the 8 hour day alone has saved the price of your membership fee a hundred times over.⁴³

Cotton pointed to the excerpt to dispel any illusions workers might have had that the bosses and their friends in Parliament were interested in improving the conditions of the working class.⁴⁴

However, Cotton's enthusiasm for the bill was short lived. In February 1911 Cotton informed his readers that the bill had come out of the committee in such an emaciated form that it was "nothing but a joke ... played by the political henchmen of the labour skimmers upon the wage slaves of Canada".⁴⁵ The 8 hour provision for all government and government contract work had been amended to an 8 hour day for work on public buildings only. As there was no minimum wage provision, the government could

⁴³ Ibid., 20 Jan. 1910, p. 1. Whose emphasis is uncertain. I presume Cotton's.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 9 Feb. 1911, p. 1.

employ workers at cheap rates. "Even Mackenzie King admitted the government could do this."⁴⁶ In May Cotton reported that the bill had been sent to a Senate Committee, an indication that the bill, in Cotton's words, "is practically burned".⁴⁷

Cotton could hardly have opposed a bill that was so obviously a land mark in labour legislation. At the same time he discounted its long range importance in helping workers. Businesses, he argued, would introduce new machines to compensate for any losses caused by the reform and more workers would become unemployed.⁴⁸

Cotton found little to praise in the Quebec Compensation Act which was passed in 1909. The act helped the Quebec worker because companies could no longer escape liability for accidents.⁴⁹ Despite this obvious benefit to the worker, Cotton emphasized that such legislation was only a palliative. In a long article he compared the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 18 May 1911, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 20 Jan. 1910, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3 Feb. 1910, p. 4.

condition of the Canadian worker and the chattel slave in the ante-bellum South. The slave states had passed reforms improving the lot of the slaves and many slave owners had protested that they were human and looked after the interests of their slaves. But the abolitionists had replied that the whole system of slavery was wrong and was not to be tolerated "even if laws were passed that made the chains that bound the slave a little less galling".⁵⁰ In the same way the Quebec bourgeoisie tried to pacify their workers. The Compensation Act was an improvement in that it did give the worker, deprived of his power to work, a bare living wage. Yet if workers were grateful to the robbers for giving them a small portion of what was rightfully theirs then, Cotton wrote, "the spirit of manhood is dead".⁵¹

But a year later in referring to workmen's compensation acts passed in Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia, Cotton wrote that their passage held great significance not for the immediate welfare of the workers,

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

but for the development of socialism. By establishing the principle of the employer's responsibility for his workers' welfare they helped destroy the liberal principle of individualism and stimulated the socialization of industry. "Humanity is on its way to socialism", he concluded. "Many people don't recognize the way they are going. If they studied socialism they would recognize the way they are moving."⁵²

III

Like Kautsky, Cotton attempted to develop a theoretical rationale on reform. But he was never so successful as his mentor and his efforts to develop a consistent policy were plagued by contradictions and ambivalence. His analysis of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act indicated his deep suspicion of any reform that emanated from government. His initial support for the Eight Hour Day bill suggested that a reform sponsored by a representative of the working class was worthy of support. Indeed, he once wrote that the criteria for

⁵² Ibid., 2 Feb. 1911, p. 4.

measuring the validity of a reform was to examine its origins. Working class inspired reforms were sound because they indicated the growing class strength of the proletariat, but bourgeois inspired reforms were bad because their enactment signified the bourgeoisie had little to fear from the working class.⁵³ Yet in early 1910 he opposed the very idea of reforms because they dulled the revolutionary sensibilities of the proletariat. "We gain admiration for false standards which is a detriment."⁵⁴ His utmost contempt was reserved for reformers who posed as friends of the working class. Such was the case of Alphonse Verville. Cotton wrote approvingly of Verville when the Eight Hour Day bill was before the House. "Verville is fighting your battle on this question. Back him up. He is a working man like yourself and he is doing your work."⁵⁵ Following the failure of the bill Cotton vilified him as "a hanger on

53 Ibid., 23 June 1910, p. 1.

54 Ibid., 10 Feb. 1910, p. 1.

55 Ibid., 24 Mar. 1910, p. 4.

to Laurier's skirts",⁵⁶ "a political scab"⁵⁷ and "a traitor to the wage slaves of Canada".⁵⁸ To say the least it was unfair to condemn Verville for the failure of a reform bill defeated by forces over which he had no control. Cotton's initial support and eventual censure of Verville revealed an inconsistent attitude towards reformers who were not socialists. While he was prepared to support a man who fought to secure a reform measure, he condemned the man when it failed. In his extravagant condemnation of Verville Cotton revealed deep frustration at his own inability to come to terms with the reformer who was not a socialist.

Yet Cotton was clearly unwilling to adopt a revolutionary stand so uncompromising that it precluded the support of reforms. In June 1914 he asked rhetorically, "Shall we advocate the final aim in a bold and indefinite manner and remain a minority party or shall we become one of the strong parties of the Dominion like the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 16 Feb. 1911, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Social-Democrats have become in Germany and by the same methods"?⁵⁹ His more moderate stand was apparently encouraged by the passage of a number of reform bills. He concluded, "The Capitalists are being forced by working class pressure to bring in reform measures. This pressure must be encouraged."⁶⁰

Why was Cotton so inconsistent on the reform issue? The small size of the socialist movement in Canada allowed him to adopt a revolutionary stance simply because the prospect of success in the immediate future was so remote. On the other hand he was forced to temper his dogmatic Marxism in order to attract worker support to the Social-Democratic Party.

Cotton's rival, The Western Clarion, had no trouble with reform. "Reforms", it claimed, "are fenders put out to prevent the old Capitalist hulk from foundering on the rocks of revolution".⁶¹ A Mr. Tom Connor argued that there was no demand more urgent than the overthrow of the Capitalist system.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 11 June 1914, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ The Western Clarion, 9 Nov. 1912, p. 3.

He continued:

Any party that calls itself a working class party and advocates palliatives under the name of immediate demands because this line of action appeals to the average wage slave at election time is more concerned with patching and reforming capitalism than about abolishing it. The working class are represented by that party which is out for the overthrow of this system of profit mongering and has no demand more immediate than that.⁶²

Cotton's ambivalence on reform was at least more perceptive than the Western Clarion's refusal to even recognize it as an issue. The Western Clarion adopted an almost lèse-majesté attitude towards its readers[#] whereas Cotton was concerned to develop a socialist movement even if it meant wrestling with the reform issue. And seen in the longer perspective of history it is hardly surprising that Cotton was unable to resolve a problem that has haunted socialism from its beginnings till the present.

⁶² Ibid., 10 May 1913, p. 1.

[#] In the November 18, 1911 issue the following appeared on Page 2: "The Western Clarion is not in the business of 'attracting' subscribers but of making socialists. Finally, plainly and bluntly it has come to this. Either there are enough revolutionaries in Canada to put the Western Clarion on a self sustaining basis or there are not; either the working class is ready for it or it is not."

CHAPTER V

UNIONISM

One result of the great economic expansion of the early years of the twentieth century was a substantial increase in the work force. In the manufacturing sector the number of employees increased from 339,173 in 1900 to 515,203 by 1910.¹ Although the vast majority of Canadian workers remained unorganized by 1914, still, union membership did increase substantially during the period. Between 1900 and 1913 membership increased from about 50,000 in about a thousand locals in 1900, to 175,799 in 2,017 locals.

¹ Canada, DBS, Canada Year Book, 1905, 1922-23 quoted in C. Lipton, The Trade Union Movement of Canada, p. 99.

in 1913.²

The growth in union membership was accompanied by increased labour strife. The number of working days lost because of strikes steadily increased from 2,461,199 in the period 1901-1905 to 4,969,739 in the period 1911-1915.³ Between 1900 and 1915 there were over fifteen hundred strikes.⁴ Strikes were frequently bitter and sometimes violent. A freight handlers' walkout at Fort William in 1909 ended in a pitched battle during which eleven constables and an unknown number of workers were wounded. Brockville, and other railway towns, experienced rioting and property damage during the 1910 Grand Trunk strike. The cruiser, Rainbow, was used at Prince Rupert in 1911 to suppress a violent strike of street labourers.⁵ One of the most savage fights between management and labour occurred at a saw mill in Buckingham, Quebec, in 1906.

² Canada, Department of Labour, Annual Report on Strike and Lockouts, 1901-1916, 1956, quoted in C. Lipton, The Trade Union Movement of Canada, p. 99.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ R. Brown and R. Cook, Canada 1896-1921, pp. 108-09.

The company refused a mediation offer from the Department of Labour and tried to carry on work as usual. On October 8th a large number of workers gathered to prevent the movement of logs by men protected by special police. A riot broke out in which two strikers and one policeman were killed and several more, on both sides, were seriously injured. Militia and regular troops arrived to restore order. The Labour Gazette finished its account of the strike. "No agreement was ever reached, but on October 24th the mill resumed normal operations, the strikers either having capitulated or found work elsewhere."⁶ The weakness of the Canadian labour movement was very apparent when workers could be treated in such a callous manner.

Trade unions, by virtue of their importance in organizing and representing many of the proletariat, were of crucial importance to the socialist parties. Yet there was often an inherent tension between the two that frequently made co-operation difficult, sometimes impossible, to achieve. While unions were interested in securing immediate benefits -

⁶ Labour Gazette, VIII, 1906-07, 556, quoted in Ibid., p. 109.

higher wages, shorter hours, better working conditions - for their members, the socialist parties' main concern was preparing for the more distant prospect of the socialist revolution. Thus the tactical manoeuvring of the trade unions to secure immediate demands collided with the long range strategy of socialist revolutionary ideology.

To Kautsky the trade unions ought to be clearly subservient to the party. In The Class Struggle, he paid scant attention to the unions beyond acknowledging that participation in union activities could give the workers excellent opportunity for training in parliamentary law and public speaking.⁷ Later, increased union strength obliged Kautsky to take a less condescending attitude towards the trade unions' relationship to the party. In a speech given to the party congress at Mannheim in 1906, Kautsky outlined his concept of what the relationship should be. Like so much else in his thinking, Kautsky's concept was based on the prospect of the eventual proletarian revolution. By its very nature, the trade unions' work was limited to the capitalist era, to defending and improving the lot of the

⁷ K. Kautsky, The Class Struggle, pp. 187-88.

workers until the revolution came. The party had the higher purpose of working for the achievement of the revolution.

In so far as the party did act as the political representative of the proletariat in the parliamentary struggle against capitalism, the party was the equal of the trade unions.

But the party's constant struggle to achieve the final goal of socialism made it superior to the trade unions which were limited in both function and time.⁸

Had the Canadian socialist movement been as strong as the German, Cotton might well have adopted Kautsky's conception of the Socialist Party's superior role in the struggle for the revolution. As it was, the weakness of Canadian socialism compared to the relative strength of organized labour obliged Cotton to take a somewhat different tack.

There are many trade unionists who think that Socialism is opposed to trade unionism. This is an entirely wrong idea. Were it not for the unions the condition of the workers would be far worse than it is today ... The International Socialist movement stands pledged

⁸ C.Schorske, German Social Democracy, p. 50.

to back up the fights of the Unions against their exploiters. We would not have them dissolved; rather would we have them grow in power.⁹

He paid tribute to "the immense service that labour unions have been to the working class" and hoped that "they would become a more powerful and active factor in industrial and political life".¹⁰ Cotton spelled out what support the trade unions could give the socialists in their efforts to achieve the revolution. He noted that in England the trade unions were supporting socialism by paying socialist members of parliament who otherwise had no income. He pointed out that the union meeting hall could be an excellent forum for the dissemination of socialist ideas. If, when the revolution finally came, it proved not to be peaceful, Cotton wrote that the trade unions would serve as the regiments of the working class. Finally, the skills of the various trade unionists would ensure that the economic system continued to function after the revolution.¹¹

9 C.W., 19 Oct. 1911, p. 4.

10 Ibid., 4 May 1911, p. 4.

11 Ibid., 16 Dec. 1911, p. 4.

Such was the theory. Yet in practice, Cotton could hardly have been satisfied with the American Federation of Labour's policy of rewarding labour's friends and punishing its enemies. Such an attitude would never help workers break away from the political tutelage of the bourgeois parties. It was no wonder that Cotton disliked Gompers whom he referred to as the artful dodger¹² and a man fit to head a trust.¹³ But he was also highly critical of Gompers' A.F. of L. which he claimed was "as conservative a union as ever existed from a working man's point of view".¹⁴ On another occasion he wrote that the A.F. of L. was nothing more than "a loose federation of skilled workers whose interests lie more with the petty bourgeoisie than with the revolutionary workers".¹⁵ He was hardly less sparing in his criticism of the Trades and Labour Congress. He accused it of ignoring the two most effective weapons the working class had at its disposal for emancipating

12 Ibid., 22 July 1909, p. 8.

13 Ibid., 12 Aug. 1909, p. 8.

14 Ibid., 19 Nov. 1909, p. 1.

15 Ibid., 21 Apr. 1910, p. 2.

itself - the ballot and industrial unionism.¹⁶ Delegates to the T.L.C. convention of 1910 passed a number of reform resolutions, among them the demands that the minimum working age be raised to sixteen, that companies be forced to pay wages in cash, and that employers advertising for scabs be required to indicate that a strike was in progress. Cotton commented that the resolutions seemed "very trifling and petty" and simply indicated that the T.L.C. busied itself with details and petitions. He concluded, "The masters do not fear the T.L.C. It can be played with. It can be fooled over and over again".¹⁷

At the basis of Cotton's aversion to the craft union was his belief that its existence made the development of a proletarian class consciousness virtually impossible. The fragmentation of some of the working class into craft unions allowed a worker to develop loyalty to his union but made it difficult for him to identify his interests with workers in other crafts. It was impossible for him to identify with the worker who belonged to no

16 Ibid., 10 Nov. 1910, p. 1.

17 Ibid.

union at all. Cotton cited an example of striking plumbers in Montreal who had not hesitated to pick up picks and shovels even though it meant that unskilled workers had lost their jobs.¹⁸ When trainmen had struck the Grand Trunk Railroad the other unions had continued working.¹⁹ Working class victory, i.e., the socialist revolution, was contingent on working class unity and that unity, he believed, could only be achieved if workers could be organized into industrial unions.²⁰

However, Cotton was confident that technological advances would make it impossible for the craft union to survive. Inventions such as wireless telegraphs which eliminated the job of the telephone linemen, the Owens glass blowing machine which threw five glass blowers out of work for each one retained, and the Edison cement house which eliminated the need for carpenters, masons and plasterers, would so undermine the traditional craft unions that they would become relics of history.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid., 19 Jan. 1911, p. 4.

¹⁹ Ibid., 10 Nov. 1911, p. 4.

²⁰ Ibid., 12 Jan. 1911, p. 2.

²¹ Ibid., 9 Mar. 1911, p. 2.

Another labour organization which attracted Cotton's attention was the Industrial Workers of the World. Founded in Chicago in 1905, the I.W.W. discovered fertile ground in the Canadian west, where, between 1908 and 1914, it organized the unskilled, itinerant workers - loggers, harvesters, longshoremen, construction workers.²² The I.W.W. preached the primacy of economic action in the class struggle and a belief in the industrial organization of the new order. The basic unit of organization was the industrial unit, for the belief was that only unions which organized all the workers in an industry could defeat concentrated capital. The end of capitalism would come when all the workers rose in a general strike.²³

Although he found fault with certain aspects of the I.W.W. philosophy, Cotton realized it had a valuable role to play in the class struggle. He paid tribute to the I.W.W.'s organization of "the poorest and most wretched

22 A.R. McCormack, "The Industrial Workers of the World in Western Canada - 1905-1914" Historical Papers, (C.H.A.R.), 1975, p. 170.

23 Ibid., pp. 173-74.

workers"²⁴ but could not condone its violent tactics.

The I.W.W. rushed in and taught them how to fight like desperate men, with sabotage, massed action and contempt for law. The respectable element even among the Socialists were shocked by the I.W.W.²⁵

However, he believed that, once the I.W.W. succeeded in improving the working conditions of its members, it would cease advocating sabotage and violence and would alter its tactics to suit changing conditions.

He was also critical of the I.W.W.'s refusal to recognize political action. This failure had forced socialists "to oppose certain phases of its agitation".²⁶ But this "anti-parliamentary stance" he attributed to the fact that the I.W.W. was a young organization.

In time the I.W.W. will recognize that political action is necessary ... The I.W.W. will help the Socialists permeate the state ... so that the state as a club in the hands of the masters will be so rotten that they cannot use it.²⁷

He concluded his article by warning that "industrial

²⁴ C.W., 13 Feb. 1913, p. 2.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

unionism opposing political action will have a long and weary and blood stained road to travel".²⁸ However industrial unionism working in conjunction with political action "will win the revolution in a few years".²⁹

In Cotton's view there were basically just two kinds of strikes. While the strike which was intended solely to gain immediate demands was considered of little value, the one which appeared to be arousing a revolutionary class consciousness among its participants received his enthusiastic support. He believed that the success of the first kind of strike, indeed where there was success, was illusory. The employers were always able to recoup their losses by finding other ways to exploit their employees. An example was a strike by C.P.R. employees, east of Port Arthur, in 1910. Because they had won an increase in pay the strike appeared to have been successful. Not so, said Cotton. The number of employees on the track had been reduced and the length of track each section-gang was responsible for was increased. Moreover, the C.P.R. began

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

charging rent for company houses it had formerly lent rent free.³⁰

An equally vivid example emerged from the strike of the Grand Trunk Railway in the same year. The unions of conductors and trainmen had walked off demanding that the basis of pay calculation be mileage, not time. Within a week the company had accepted the unions' demands and had promised to rehire all striking employees within three weeks of the end of the strike. In one way the workers benefitted from the strike; they gained an increase of six hundred thousand dollars in wages. At the same time, the company cancelled all accumulated pension rights saying that the workers, by striking, had broken the continuity of their employment. Furthermore, it refused to dismiss the scabs hired during the strike on the grounds that they had proven their efficiency.³¹

³⁰ Ibid., 22 June 1911, p. 4.

³¹ R. MacGregor Dawson, William Lyon Mackenzie King A Political Biography, 1874-1923, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1958, p. 209.

Cotton did not think that the workers had gained much. "The men were either beaten or betrayed. This is the only conclusion that can be arrived at."³² Though the strikers did win increased pay, many of them were not rehired. "The strikers of the G.T.R. were fighting the class war. Yet their victory has brought bigger pay to the scabs who have taken their place .,. The suffering of the class patriots ... has benefited the economic position of the scabs."³³ On the loss of pensions he was equally vehement. Not only did the strikers lose what small pension benefits the company had given them but "THEY LOSE WHAT THEY THEMSELVES HAVE PAID TOWARDS KEEPING THEMSELVES IN THEIR OLD AGE."³⁴

A strike of the second kind was the Springhill strike which began in 1909 and lasted through 1910. In August 1909 miners at Springhill struck the Cumberland Railway and Coal Co. Although a majority of the miners voted to break affiliation with the Provincial Workingmen's Association and join the United Mine Workers of

³² C.W., 18 Aug. 1910, p. 1.

³³ Ibid., 11 Aug. 1910, p. 1.

³⁴ Ibid., Cotton's emphasis.

America, the Cumberland Railway and Coal Co. and later the Dominion Coal Co. which bought it out in January 1911, refused to recognize the U.M.W. as bargaining agent for the workers. The strikes which followed "were the bitterest disputes in the history of the coal industry in Nova Scotia".³⁵

This strike received Cotton's enthusiastic support. He informed his readers of the abuses suffered by the workers. The courts issued injunctions against picketing and permitted the company to import scabs.³⁶ Twenty-five families were evicted from company homes³⁷ and workers were forbidden to pick coal to warm their tents.³⁸ In early July 1910 three hundred troops of the Royal Canadian Regiment were sent to Springhill on the orders of Judge G. Patterson to pacify the workers.³⁹

³⁵ H.A. Logan, The History of Trade Union Organization in Canada, p. 116.

³⁶ C.W., 2 June 1910, p. 1.

³⁷ Ibid., 21 July 1910, p. 4.

³⁸ Ibid., 3 Mar. 1910, p. 4.

³⁹ Ibid., 21 July 1910, p. 4.

The strike had aspects of a genuine class confrontation. Workers were in conflict with capitalists who were supported by the courts and the government. Furthermore, in the person of Jules Lavenne whose motto was, "No truce, no rest until the Socialist Revolution is here", the Springhill workers had a genuine socialist leader. A reader in Springhill wrote about a parade held on August 10, 1910.

Red flags were flying the length of the street. Banners were inscribed 'Working men of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains ...' 1000 men were in the line ...Towards the rear Lavenne marshalled about 100 little boys and girls carrying small red flags.⁴⁰

Cotton proclaimed

Springhill is thoroughly revolutionized. The workers are awake. They know the class struggle and are fighting their fight along the lines of Marxian philosophy ... I take up the fight for socialism, for Jules Lavenne and for the suffering workers at Springhill. I want each of you to feel that the winning of this strike depends on you. This fight is not to be won in an hour. So let us prepare ourselves.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid., 26 Aug. 1910, p. 2.

⁴¹ Ibid., 18 Aug. 1910, p. 1.

The Springhill strike was the only one Cotton supported unequivocally. He wanted to see a harmony of interests between the socialist and trade union movements. "The socialist parties work in the political struggle, the unions in the economic,"⁴² he once wrote. But this ideal often conflicted with his belief that progress towards the socialist revolution was the touchstone of all worthwhile activity. Thus he was far from being an uncritical admirer of unions and their activities. He supported industrial unionism because he believed it helped develop a class consciousness but attacked the craft unions because they fragmented the proletariat. He criticized the I.W.W.'s violent tactics and its neglect of the political fight but praised its efforts in revolutionizing the most wretched of the proletariat. He supported strikes, like the Springhill strike, which developed a class consciousness and was critical of those which, he considered, did not.

⁴² Ibid., 19 Oct. 1911, p. 4.

CHAPTER VI

TRUSTS AND THE DISINTEGRATION

OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

In the early years of the twentieth century the consolidation of existing businesses was carried out on a large scale. "In the late nineteenth century much of Canadian industry was personally owned in small units. However, the development of new power sources and more sophisticated production techniques led to the need for public financing. "This method of financing, generally new to Canadian manufacturing, helped integrate and consolidate industry in the first decade of the new century".¹

The consolidation movement began in 1909. In that year nine consolidations with an authorized capital

¹ Brown and Cook, Canada 1896 - 1921, p. 91.

of \$134 million were made. There were twenty-two mergers capitalized at \$157 million in 1910. Among them were Dominion Cannery Ltd. (a consolidation of thirty-four factories of Canadian Cannery and fourteen independent companies), Dominion Steel Corporation, and the British Columbia Packers Association. In 1911 the Canada Bread Co. and Sherwin Williams Co. were just two of fourteen consolidations capitalized at \$96 million. In 1912 there were thirteen mergers with capitalization of \$97 million.²

In the Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels wrote that this trend was an inevitable consequence of developing capitalism. Insufficient capital and skills made obsolete by new methods of production forced the lower strata of the middle class - the small trades shopkeepers, the handicraftsmen and peasants into the proletariat.³ In his book, The Class Struggle, Karl Kautsky echoed this idea when he wrote,

² H.G. Staples The Recent Consolidation Movement in Canadian Industry, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1922, quoted in Brown and Cook, Canada 1896 - 1921, pp. 91 - 92.

³ Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto, p. 88.

Industries conducted on a large scale constantly expand. Establishments that once counted their workmen by hundreds become giant concerns that employ thousands of hands. Day by day the small business establishments disappear; the industrial development, instead of increasing, steadily decreases the number of individual enterprises.⁴

Cotton frequently noted the formation of large businesses and trusts in Canada. The A.E. Rae Company, a department store, was established in Montreal by a group of manufacturers who wanted their own outlet because Eaton's and Simpson's were starting their own manufacturing divisions.⁵ D. Lorne McGibbon, who had formed the Canadian rubber trust, was planning to form a shoe trust.⁶ In January 1910 he quoted an article from the Toronto Globe which reported a rumoured massive Iron and Steel Trust to include the Dominion Iron and Steel Co., The Lake Superior Consolidated Co., The Atikokan Iron Co. of Port Arthur, The Montreal Rolling Mills and the Hamilton Steel and Iron Co.⁷ In March 1911 Cotton wrote about a \$12 million

4 K. Kautsky, The Class Struggle, p. 63.

5 C.W., 4 Nov. 1909, p. 1.

6 Ibid., 16 Feb. 1911, p. 1.

7 Ibid., 6 Jan. 1910, p. 1.

coal merger, organized in Montreal, that included the Western Coal and Coke Company, Lethbridge Collieries, St. Albert Collieries and the Pacific Pass Collieries.⁸ Furthermore, governments supported the tendency to large scale business; witness the Federal Government granting the Manitoba Power Company the right to build and operate its own railroad lines.⁹

Cotton argued that the growth of large scale business was a natural development in the capitalist economy. First, competition was wasteful; there was no point in having several small stores doing the same job when one large store would suffice.¹⁰ Secondly, the capitalists had discovered that the best way to fight small corporations was to amalgamate or at least co-operate.¹¹ Thirdly, consolidations not only had competitive advantages but they were also less costly to run per unit of output than smaller businesses, so profits

8 Ibid., 2 Mar. 1911, p. 2.

9 Ibid., 16 Mar. 1911, p. 4.

10 Ibid., 9 Mar. 1911, p. 4.

11 Ibid., 21 Oct. 1909, p. 3.

were larger.¹²

The leaders of large businesses had been successful in convincing the public that large corporations which dominated their markets were in the interests of the public.¹³ If five small merchants got together to agree not to sell below a given price, their action, wrote Cotton, would be called "conspiracy in restraint of trade".¹⁴ However, if the same five formed a joint stock company and then put up the price "the Canadian papers would hail them as brilliant financiers and their company's stock would be listed and the squeeze they had on the public would be put down as 'earnings'".¹⁵

Small industry was also doomed to extinction. The small industrial employer, like the merchant, was the victim of economic forces over which he had no control. With few employees and simple machinery it was difficult

¹² Ibid., 15 Dec. 1910, p. 1.

¹³ Ibid., 18 Nov. 1909, p. 4.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

for him to compete against industries with large work forces and sophisticated machines.¹⁶ His shortage of capital funds compelled him to buy in small quantities at high prices.¹⁷ He was forced to pay high freight rates per unit of cargo because his shipments were usually small.¹⁸ His weak financial position meant he paid high interest on bank loans. Moreover, banks were part of big business - so they cared little about the problems of the small employer.¹⁹

Cotton frequently mentioned the plight of the small town retail merchant who was forced to compete against the mail order catalogues of Eaton's and Simpson's.²⁰ Cotton reminded his readers that in Bellamy's Looking Backward goods had been sold by sample. "Even now we have gone

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 20 Oct. 1910, p. 1.

²⁰ Ibid., 10 Feb. 1910, p. 1. One of the few advertisements that Cotton's Weekly carried was, every few months, a quarter page advertisement for Simpson's mail order catalogue. This must have been the only occasion in which Cotton's immediate financial interests coincided with hastening the process of revolution.

beyond that. Goods are sold by catalogue."²¹ The signs indicated that catalogue ordering was bound to increase. The department stores advertised free shipment of goods to the nearest railway station.²² The Postmaster General promised to establish a parcel post and accused the small merchants of stubborn prejudice when they protested.²³ As a result, the small merchant was reduced to "scampering around from customer to customer to collect little accounts to meet his Saturday payroll".²⁴ The failure of the small town merchant also meant the eventual failure of the local newspaper which depended so heavily on him for advertisements.²⁵

Furthermore, Cotton welcomed the tendency to large scale business. "Socialists do not want to stop that tendency but to increase and hasten the process."²⁶ The development of trusts was a necessary prelude to the

21 Ibid., 9 June 1910, p. 4.

22 Ibid., 2 Sept. 1910, p. 1.

23 Ibid., 9 June 1910, p. 4.

24 Ibid., 12 May 1910, p. 4.

25 Ibid., 2 Mar. 1911, p. 2.

26 Ibid., 17 Feb. 1910, p. 1.

socialist revolution. "Capitalist combination is bad. Socialist combination is good; but socialist combination cannot come until capitalist combination has made its advent possible."²⁷ Therefore, the ruthless capitalist who crushed competition actually helped bring the socialist revolution that much quicker.²⁸

Cotton argued that the development of the trust was important for a variety of reasons. First, it meant the end of the small merchant. Unable to compete against the trusts, he was forced out of business. Initially his anger was directed at the owners of the large trusts. But he soon realized that his anger made no sense because the changes taking place in industrial society could not be reversed.²⁹ Gradually the ruined businessman discarded the values such as genteel respectability, the reward of thrift, the desirability of competition, all of which had been handed down to him by a triumphant bourgeoisie.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 2 Feb. 1911, p. 4.

²⁹ Ibid., 7 Oct. 1909, p. 1.

³⁰ Ibid., 6 Apr. 1911, p. 4.

Eventually he was "willing to join the Socialist ranks".³¹

The growth of trusts was important for a second, quite different, reason. Consolidation of industries which led to the development of large corporations meant that corporate power would eventually overshadow the power of the state.

Many men don't realize how the industrial unit is becoming all powerful and how the state is sliding into the background ... Politics today in Canada play only a secondary role. Men are not vitally interested in the political state. They are, however, vitally interested in the actions of corporations.³²

Cotton saw a perfect example of this tendency in the plans of the U.S. Steel Corporation for the city of Gary, Indiana. The company was proposing to build not just the steel works but the stores and homes as well. The effective power of the company over the citizens would be far greater than any government's.³³

In Canada, the example was the C.P.R. The men who had planned the C.P.R. had been able to get the govern-

³¹ Ibid., 30 June 1910, p. 4.

³² Ibid., 1st Oct. 1909, p. 1.

³³ Ibid., 26 May 1910, p. 4.

ment to back their enterprise with "unimaginable wealth". and had built a corporate empire that in 1908, Cotton claimed, netted \$33 million net profit, one third the national revenue of Canada.³⁴ In 1910 the C.P.R. still owned 13,268,825 acres valued at \$180 million which it had been given by the Ottawa government.³⁵ The corporation offered to prepare land for the settler, seed it and build his house for \$500. Had the government done that it would have been accused of paternalism; instead, the C.P.R. was praised in the capitalist press for its concern for "the welfare of Canada".³⁶ The relationship of the federal government to the C.P.R. was almost that of slave to master. Having given the railroads millions of dollars and acres of land, the government was reduced to putting up level crossing safety appliances at a cost of \$200,000 over five years. "Such a course", Cotton wrote, "would not please the railroads and our Dominion Government has been properly tamed to feed out of the

34 Ibid., 1 Dec. 1910, p. 4.

35 Ibid., 20 Dec. 1910, p. 4.

36 Ibid., 23 Dec. 1909, p. 4.

hands of capitalists."³⁷

Even the capitalist papers acknowledged the great power of the C.P.R. Cotton quoted the Toronto Globe on the appointment of William Whyte as second vice-president.

For the man whose word is law up and down the 6,000 odd miles of the C.P.R. system in Western Canada - for a man who holds the destinies of thousands of employees in his hands - William Whyte is a delightfully companionable human.³⁸

"There", exclaimed Cotton, "is a capitalist sheet acknowledging that we live under an autocracy in industry."³⁹ The power of the C.P.R. was awesome. It sent youths to college, irrigated vast regions, reforested large areas to supply its own timber needs. "Within the system, the C.P.R. takes the place of the old political state in the hopes and fears of the men employed by it."⁴⁰

According to Cotton, once the Socialist Party captured political power it would abolish the political

37 Ibid., 18 Mar. 1909, p. 1.

38 Ibid., 31 Mar. 1910, p. 1.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 14 Oct. 1909, p. 1.

state whose importance had been steadily eroded and allow each business to become a self-governing unit owned and operated by its workers.⁴¹ Workers in each business would elect their own management and decide on the distribution of revenue. "Employees, instead of being wage slaves driven to their tasks by hunger, would become free, democratic, industrial electors."⁴² Thus, in Cotton's conception, the bourgeois owned and managed corporation was readily transformed into the basic economic and political unit of the socialist society. As we shall see, Cotton had no idea at all of how difficult the transition might be.

In early 1910 legislation entitled An Act to Provide for the Investigation of Combines, Monopolies and Mergers was introduced to the House of Commons by the Minister of Labour, Mackenzie King. King said that the intention of the bill was not to break up combines, for he did not want to prevent any industry from, as he put it, "perfecting organization"⁴³ in the face of world wide

⁴¹ Ibid., 26 May 1910, p. 4.

⁴² Ibid., 25 Aug. 1909, p. 1.

⁴³ Canada, House of Commons Debates, 18 Jan. 1910, 2058 - 59, quoted in Brown and Cook, Canada 1896-1921, p. 93.

competition; rather, he wanted "to afford the means of conserving to the public some of the benefits which arise from large organizations of capital for the purpose of business and commerce".⁴⁴

The bill allowed six people to initiate a complaint against corporations suspected of price fixing. The complaint would be subject to judicial review and then passed on to an investigating board which, if it found the corporation guilty, could levy a fine against it. However, it was King's hope that the threat of public exposure would be sufficient to deter industries from acting contrary to the public interest. The bill was not successful. In the nine years before its repeal only one case was ever heard. "Businessmen had accurately detected little to fear in the anti-combines legislation of the Laurier Liberals."⁴⁵

Long before the government introduced the anti-combines legislation Cotton had been commenting on the Laurier government's attitude to competition and trusts.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Brown and Cook, Canada, 1896 - 1921, pp. 93-94.

He accused the government of backing the Grand Trunk Pacific in order that the C.P.R. should face some competition. "The C.P.R. and G.T.P. will not compete," wrote Cotton. "There will be tacit understanding between the executives of the two lines and the public will be skinned."⁴⁶

Cotton believed that forcing companies to compete was futile. "We have hardware trusts, railroad trusts and many others ... Even bee keepers in Ontario meet in annual session to fix a standard price for their goods."⁴⁷ He maintained that any attempt to forestall the formation of trusts in order to maintain competition was futile. "Competition is wasteful. The larger the plant and the more highly organized the system of industry, the less labour cost it will take to manufacture each article. To return to competition, to force men into fighting each other, is a backward step."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ C.W., 25 Feb. 1909, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 4 Mar. 1909, p. 1.

He reported that the throne speech, which opened the session in which King introduced the Anti-Combines legislation, mentioned that the Government intended to legislate more stringent measures against trusts. Cotton discounted the promise as an empty gesture to pacify the small businessman. "The Laurier government is the friend of the financiers. It gives the country away to the Grand Trunk Pacific. It makes laws so that giant organizations can crush individual concerns."⁴⁹

A month after the Anti-Combines bill was introduced to the House of Commons Cotton wrote, "Laurier is introducing legislation to curb the trusts and force humanity back into competition. The childish thing."⁵⁰ In fact, Cotton gave the bill far more power than it was due. As has been shown above, the bill was weak to the point of being ineffectual. But whether Cotton's assessment was correct or not is not important here. His criticism did show his adamant opposition to any attempts to break up the trusts.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 18 Nov. 1909, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 17 Feb. 1910, p. 1.

Cotton's efforts to prove that there was a centralizing tendency in Canadian business, that competition was virtually dead and that any legislative efforts to stop the tendency were futile, underscore the importance he placed on the formation of trusts in laying the foundations for the socialist revolution. Centralization of business accomplished a number of things. By eliminating the small businessman the trusts increased the size of the proletariat at the expense of the bourgeoisie. Cotton's belief that state power was being replaced by corporate power meant that he did not think the abolition of the state would be a difficult task. The socialists would use the large corporations as the basis for industrial democracy which would replace political democracy. Each industry would be owned and managed by the workers in it. So it was that the tendency to centralization in the capitalist economy helped produce the conditions for capitalism's downfall and its replacement by the socialist society.

CHAPTER VII

NATIONALISM

The revival of prosperity at the turn of the century ended a period of depression that had afflicted Canada since the early 1870ies. Prosperity put an end to a mood of pessimism, failure and doubts about Canada's future and gave rise to optimism that a growing Canada would work in close co-operation with Britain and the Empire.¹ "The economic foundations of the Dominion seemed so secure that Sir Wilfrid Laurier's boast of the twentieth century belonging to Canada seemed more an appraisal than a prophecy."²

¹ R.C. Brown and R. Cook, Canada 1896-1921, p. 28.

² H.B. Neatby, "The New Century", The Canadians 1867-1967, Pt. 1, Macmillan, Toronto, 1967, p. 138-39.

In the Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels wrote that, by centralizing the means of production, the bourgeoisie had done away with scattered states of population and had concentrated them in a few areas. Political centralization had followed as a necessary consequence.

Independent, or but loosely connected, provinces with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class interest, one frontier and one customs-tariff.³

In an essay "The Modern Nationality" Kautsky echoed Marx and Engels by asserting that the modern state had developed in response to the merchants' need to regulate the internal market and to support the interests of merchants abroad.⁴

In Cotton's view Canada was a country with little history, artificially delimited boundaries and a population which was "a hodge podge of alien races".⁵

³ Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto, p. 85.

⁴ Kautsky, "Die moderne Nationalität", Neue Zeit, V (1887), p. 402, quoted in H.B. Davis, Nationalism and Socialism, Marxist and Labor Theories of Nationalism to 1917, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1967, p. 140.

⁵ C.W., 9 June 1910, p. 1.

He once wrote that the only true Canadian was the red Indian whom "the patriotic bosses will not have hanging around their kitchens".⁶ In fact Canada was nothing more than "an artificial country thrown together by the B.N.A. act".⁷

Canadian nationalism was a bourgeois ideology meant to mask the exploitation of the workers by Canadian capitalists. The term National Policy had been coined for a series of tariffs which allowed Canadian capitalists to develop profitable businesses by exploiting Canadian labour.⁸ Moreover, the Canadian capitalist was quite prepared to overcome his nationalist scruples when it meant importing foreign capital to develop Canadian resources. He believed that it was inevitable that the workers would become aware that "the pride of country in these days of international syndicates for the exploitation of the working class of all countries is a sham and a delusion".⁹

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 9 June 1910, p. 1.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 5 May 1910, p. 1.

Although he saw no great difference between Americans and Canadians, Cotton did believe the French Canadians had a separate identity. He saw no reason why French Canadians should not have manners, customs and laws fitting the French temperament.¹⁰ To support his position he noted that socialists supported the nationalist aspirations of the Indians and Egyptians.¹¹ Furthermore, although Cotton did not mention it, European Marxists supported the nationalist movements of various cultural minorities in Eastern Europe.¹²

An issue which compelled Cotton to define his attitude towards Canadian nationalism was the Naval Bill. During the early years of the century the British government increasingly looked to the Dominions for support in the naval competition with Germany. In response to the feeling in English Canada that something should be done, in 1910 Laurier proposed a bill to create a small

¹⁰ Ibid., 18 Nov. 1909, p. 1.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² For example both Engels and Kautsky supported Polish independence. See H.B. Davis, Nationalism and Socialism, pp. 140-41.

Canadian navy. The Anglophone Conservatives sneered at Laurier's "tin-pot" navy and demanded that Canada make direct contributions to the Royal Navy. The Francophone Conservatives, led by Frederick Monk and supported by Henri Bourassa and his new newspaper, Le Devoir, attacked the bill on the grounds that, in war time, the navy would be turned over to the British Admiralty and so Canada would be drawn into British imperialist wars.

Like Monk and Bourassa, Cotton opposed the bill. He dismissed out of hand Laurier's contention that a navy was needed to protect Canadian sovereignty. Laurier, among others, had cried for foreign capital. "Our western land, pulp mills, silver mines, and other natural resources have been handed over to foreign capitalists."¹³ Laurier, he contended, "has sold Canada into bondage to American and European capitalists ... then has the audacity to say that Canada needs a navy to protect her from foreign domination".¹⁴ A Canadian navy, he believed, would simply become an instrument of British imperialism,

¹³ C. W., 25 Nov. 1909, p. 1.

¹⁴ Ibid.

helping the British navy, among other things, "to stuff opium into the pipes of wretched Chinese who are struggling to free themselves from the curse".¹⁵

He contended that the government's main motive was to provide large profits for Canadian shipbuilders. "Money taken from labour ... is frittered away on murder ships that will provide fat contracts for parasite capitalists who get government contracts."¹⁶ He accused Laurier of having "numerous friends with coal to sell and steel to dispose of".¹⁷ He argued that the difference between the Conservative and Liberal positions was more apparent than real. Both parties represented bourgeois interests. The difference in this instance was that ... "Borden has the imperial bee buzzing in his head. Laurier stands for the home labour thief. Borden stands for the British labour thief."¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 26 Jan. 1911, p. 1.

¹⁷ Ibid., 8 Dec. 1910, p. 1.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Thus, in Cotton's view, the dispute between the two parties was a great deal of talk signifying nothing. Canada had no need of a navy to protect her national interests because she had no national interests to protect. The proposed naval building program was simply another way for the bourgeoisie to enrich itself at the expense of the proletariat.

Cotton's analysis of reciprocity, an issue which attracted his attention in early 1911, also revealed his attitude towards nationalism. As a result of two meetings held in late 1910 and early 1911, the Canadian and American governments agreed to effect reciprocal free trade in grain, fish, fruits, vegetables, farm animals and to lower duties on some food products such as canned goods as well as on agricultural implements, engines and a variety of other articles.¹⁹ The agreement was to be embodied in a treaty to be passed simultaneously in Congress and the Canadian Parliament.²⁰

¹⁹ D. Creighton, Dominion of the North, Macmillan, New York, 1944, p. 432.

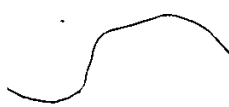
²⁰ Ibid.

Parliamentary discussion on the treaty opened on February 9, 1911 and lasted until early May when Parliament recessed and Laurier went to the coronation of George V. Debate was resumed on July 18th but the treaty had not been passed when Parliament was dissolved on July 29th for an election on September 22nd.²¹ The Liberal government's defeat meant the death of reciprocity.

Cotton's first impulse was to oppose reciprocity, although he did so uncertainly. He had difficulty explaining why a bourgeois government would seek to undermine Canadian business interests. He claimed, unconvincingly, that the Government's intention was to blackmail industrialists into contributing more funds to the Liberal Party. He concluded his attack, "Judging by the few manufactured goods in the list it would seem that the industrialists are backing down".²² He warned the farmers not to be seduced into the camp of the labour

²¹ L.E. Ellis, Canada's Rejection of Reciprocity in 1911, CHAR, 1939, p. 104.

²² C.W., 9 Feb. 1911, p. 1.



thieves by thinking that reciprocity would bring lower priced manufactured goods as a result of competition between Canadian and American companies. The trusts were international and, even if the farmers received higher prices for their wheat, the gain would be offset by the trusts raising their prices.²³ "The remedy for evil conditions does not lie in Canada and the U.S.A. swapping miseries. It lies in each of the two countries removing the oppression within their own borders."²⁴

In the following issue of the paper Cotton reversed his position and wrote a long article supporting reciprocity. His analysis of reciprocity revealed a strong anti-national, continentalist bias. The effect of free trade would be to pull Canada into the American economy. Canada would be thrust into "the vortex of advanced capitalism".²⁵ The German socialists, Cotton noted, looked to the U.S.A. as the country most likely to experience a socialist revolution first.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 16 Feb. 1911, p. 1.

²⁵ Ibid., 9 Mar. 1911, p. 4.

There the capitalists have been the most ruthless. There the workers have been the most pitilessly driven. There machinery has been most extensively employed to displace and beat down labor. There the conditions render the Socialist revolt the most necessary.²⁶

Canada, on the other hand, had scarcely left the pastoral state. Only in Glace Bay, Springhill, Montreal and Toronto were the workers to any extent class conscious.²⁷ As part of the American economy Canada would experience natural resource exploitation and industrialization on a massive scale. Cotton envisioned a Canada "ripped of her treasure, gutted of her forests, her skies blackened by the smoke of hundreds of factories".²⁸ This was all to the good, for it meant that Canada would pass quickly through the capitalist stage into socialism.²⁹ His

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

penultimate paragraph read,

Under reciprocity Canada will pass quickly through the capitalist stage. Under national development capitalism will develop slower and Canadians will suffer the fever of its unrest for a longer and more trying period.³⁰

After his initial reaction, Cotton's stand on reciprocity was consistent. He believed that Canadian nationalism hindered the development of capitalism in this country. As long as Canada remained an economic entity the process of industrial development would take longer and, as a consequence, the socialist revolution would be delayed. Therefore, reciprocity was to be welcomed because it would help destroy economic nationalism.

Cotton accepted the Marxist analysis of nationalism as it was given in the Communist Manifesto. He believed that it was a useful tool of the bourgeoisie to develop national economics, but that it was a temporary phenomenon which would eventually be rendered obsolete by the international flow of trade and capital.

³⁰ Ibid.

However, Cotton was not even prepared to admit that a Canadian nation existed. There was a geographical area called Canada which had its own political institutions. There was some industry protected by the tariff wall of the National Policy. But most of the resources were controlled by foreigners and in no sense was the country homogeneous. Neither race, nor language, nor religion was a unifying factor.

Cotton's attitude towards the Naval Bill showed that he considered the discussion of national protection to be irrelevant simply because there was no real nation to protect. On the other hand, reciprocity was desirable because it would shatter the illusion of Canadian nationalism and merge the incipient Canadian industrial economy into the more highly developed American one. The Canadian proletariat would benefit from being part of a more advanced industrial economy which was that much closer to a socialist revolution.

In Cotton's view there was no substance to Canadian nationalism. It was strictly an ideology manufactured by the bourgeoisie for the purpose of building an industrial economy behind high tariffs. Moreover, it was hindering the progress of industrial development by

isolating Canada from the more industrially advanced U.S.A. But Cotton did accept the reality of French Canadian nationalism. At the same time, however, he regarded Quebec as a semi-feudal society. Eventually, of course, the Quebec economy would become merged in the international economy and the French Canadian proletariat would realize that its true interests lay with the international proletariat in the fight against the bourgeoisie.

CHAPTER VIII

CHRISTIANITY

At the time Cotton was publishing his paper religion was a very important feature of Canadian life. In Quebec, the impact of the Roman Catholic Church extended far beyond the church doors into virtually every aspect of French-Canadian life. In his book, The Race Question in Canada, first published in 1906, André Siegfried wrote, "In every aspect of life, social or political, public or private, the clergy expects to have its way and to give its orders ... and since the obstacles in its way are feeble or non-existent, it tends in the province of Quebec to constitute a veritable little theocracy".¹ Although the influence of religion was not as powerful and pervasive in

¹ A. Siegfried, The Race Question in Canada, edited by F. Underhill, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1966, p. 35.

English Canada, the fact remained that the overwhelming majority of people claimed allegiance to a religious faith.² Siegfried noted that it was certainly unfashionable in the upper classes to be irreligious and, even among the poor classes, "a man was looked at somewhat askance who does not belong to some one denomination".³

Apart from Marx, no historical figure received more acclaim in Cotton's Weekly than Christ. Cotton was too committed to Marxist ideology to have subscribed to the statement of a correspondent that "Christ goes deeper than Marx in diagnosing ills"⁴ but his respect for Jesus stood in stark contrast to his contempt for contemporary Christian leaders. Cotton's Christ was in no sense a spiritual figure. "We find he had little to say about the future life ... He had great faith in the powers of life."⁵ Cotton once called Him "the first great successful labour leader".⁶ The essential Christ described in Cotton's Weekly

2 The 1901 census records only 4,181 cases of persons claiming no religious affiliation and only 3,613 professed "agnostics". Ibid., p. 56.

3 Ibid.

4 C.S. Barnes in C.W., 14 Sept. 1913, p. 1.

5 C.W., 26 Aug. 1909, p. 2.

6 Ibid., 8 Apr. 1909, p. 1.

was the revolutionary who stood in opposition to Jewish and Roman authorities,⁷ condemned the mammon of trade⁸ and was finally "railroaded to death because his teachings were not liked by the plundering classes".⁹ Cotton urged the workers to discover the real Christ and disregard "the Christ of the reactionary churches ... Who is used simply as a cloak to hide the treachery of his lip worshippers."¹⁰ "Is it not our duty", he asked rhetorically, "to rescue the first great Comrade from the slanders of many of his alleged followers?"¹¹

In Cotton's view nascent Christianity had much in common with modern socialism. "In spirit", he wrote, "socialism is nearer primitive Christianity than any other movement on earth".¹² The early Christians had practised a kind of tribal communism of property and were able to

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 6 May 1909, p. 8.

9 Ibid., 7 Aug. 1913, p. 1.

10 Ibid., 15 July 1909, p. 8.

11 Ibid., 14 Aug. 1913, p. 1.

12 Ibid., 7 Aug. 1913, p. 1.

maintain a high degree of spiritual excellence;¹³ as a movement, Christianity had been important in freeing the slaves.¹⁴ Cotton relied on Kautsky's Origins of Christianity to explain the loss of the revolutionary imperative in Christianity. Kautsky wrote that Christianity was a social, not a religious, movement whose roots were to be found in the communistic organization of the period of history in which Christianity originated. In its origins, Christianity had been entirely independent of the person of Jesus whom Kautsky reduced to the role of one-social agitator among a number. The martyrdom of Christ had resulted in the ideals of the movement becoming so completely identified with Him that He had become a thoroughly unhistorical figure removed from the context of his own time.¹⁵

Kautsky argued that the revolutionary impulse was finally killed when an official bureaucracy, in the form of an episcopacy, was established.

¹³ Ibid., 18 Aug. 1910, p. 2.

¹⁴ Ibid., 20 Apr. 1911, p. 1.

¹⁵ K. Kautsky, The Origins of Christianity, in Ibid., 9 Sept. 1909, p. 3.

In this way the originally democratic primitive Christianity became in the course of time an Episcopal bureaucracy. It was not until Christianity had assumed this form that it became satisfactory for the uses of imperial despotism and in shape to be made the religion of the State.¹⁶

Primitive Christianity did try to reassert itself in its communist spirit in the monastic movement. But it was crushed by the greed of the clergy and Christianity became more than ever divorced from its original purpose.¹⁷

Undoubtedly Cotton shared Kautsky's belief that the generous and revolutionary impulses of the early Christian movement had long since dissipated. Nowadays what characterized religious practice was its irrational nature. He once wrote "religious experiences are a composite of blind emotion and irrational mental processes".¹⁸ The emotional fervour of a Salvation Army meeting and a Methodist revival were deliberately calculated to persuade people to sacrifice thinking for feeling.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ C.W., 5 Aug. 1909, p. 1.

¹⁹ Ibid., 26 Dec. 1912, p. 1.

Cotton also fiercely criticized religious leaders for supporting the bourgeois system. "Christian Churches have made a firm and fast alliance with mammon and the slave driving capitalists occupy the chief pews thereof"²⁰ and "the ministers of the gospel were dragged captive behind the chariot wheels of the rich".²¹ By contorting Christian morality preachers tried "to justify the thievings of the labour thieves while condemning the thievings of the tempted poor".²² He accused the churches of perpetuating the hoax that men needed them "if they are to become good",²³ while they ignored the fact that only through the proper channelling of economic forces could men become good.²⁴ In fact the churches had a vested interest in maintaining the existing class system for "if the bad woman became good without the aid of the tom-toms of the Salvation Army ... or the emotionalism of the Methodists or the speculative anarchistic philosophy of the Congregationalists",²⁵ the churches would be forced

²⁰ Ibid., 4 May 1911, p. 1.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 5 Aug. 1909, p. 1.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

out of existence because they could no longer point to the wicked and frighten their own congregations into thinking that they must support their churches if they were to escape such fates.²⁶

Such were Cotton's general principles on Christianity. Yet the churches in Canada differed one from the other and the proportion of the good and bad in each also differed. One group which Cotton attacked bitterly was the Salvation Army.

Born in Britain's industrial slums, the Salvation Army appeared in Canada towards the end of the 19th century. It appealed directly to the disaffected urban masses, to those who had no claim to social, economic and moral respectability. Imbued with an enormous religious zeal and devotion, the Army tended to be held in a state of political and economic illiteracy, an effect which helped retard the development of working class organizations.²⁷ Cotton distinguished between the Army's

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ S.D. Clark, Church and Sect in Canada, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1948, p. 424.

spiritual and temporal roles. "We Socialists do not mind the Salvation Army saving the souls of people if they will";²⁸ However, Cotton did mind the active social role the Army played. While he grudgingly admitted that the Army did try to feed, clothe and give shelter to the indigent, Cotton accused it of actively engaging in the class war as a supporter of the capitalists. He contended that the Army acted as a labour agency for capitalists wanting cheaper labour than they were already employing. So the security of the working man was threatened by the work of the Salvation Army as a labour agent. Cotton branded it "a recruiting agent for scabs and blacklegs".²⁹

Even more sinister was the Army's work on an international level. Its function, Cotton argued, was to help the capitalists defuse potential working class rebellion by transferring workers to less industrially developed areas. Cotton accused the Army of working with the C.P.R. to fill up C.P.R. lands in the West with unemployed British workers. "Thus unemployment is relieved in Great Britain and the threat of revolution diminishes.

28 C.W., 29 Sept. 1910, p. 4.

29 Ibid., 13 Oct. 1910, p. 1.

By populating the Canadian West, the Salvation Army gives British capitalists opportunities to invest their dividends."³⁰

The case of the Catholic Church was more complicated. He believed that the culture of French Canada was essentially feudal. By drawing off the surplus value in the form of tithes and spending money on religious institutions, the Church prevented the development of an industrial economy and a class of proletarians.³¹ In this sense the Church was a threat to socialism. Still, her determination to fight capitalism sometimes put the Church into the ironical position of adopting socialist programs to do so. Cotton pointed to the example of a priest in Thedford who was organizing a workers' savings bank and to two priests in Oka who were organizing a farmers' union.³²

³⁰ Ibid., 29 July 1909, p. 1.

³¹ "In Montreal there are huge Catholic Churches, monasteries and nunneries filled with lazy priests and nuns. The Roman Catholic Church has deliberately set itself to work to consume the surplus product produced by its adherents." Ibid., 28 Oct. 1909, p. 1.

³² Ibid., 16 Sept. 1909, p. 2.

But essentially Cotton regarded the Catholic Church as a reactionary institution. His pessimism about her being able to act against capitalism was well reflected in his attitude to one of the most reform minded of ardent Catholics - Henri Bourassa. He admired Bourassa as having the blood of a revolutionary, "But yet he has not developed the brains of a revolutionary".³³ He was without any doctrine that was relevant to contemporary problems. "If he were modern instead of medieval, Bourassa would stir Quebec to its foundations."³⁴ Even though he sometimes mentioned the abuses of capitalists against labour,³⁵ Bourassa, in Cotton's view, was still a reformer without an understanding of economics, a moralist who wanted to turn back the clock, an individualist who did not understand that in the modern world men were becoming socialized. As long as he worked through the Church his cause was doomed. Had he decided to fight the Church, he could

³³ Ibid., 5 Oct. 1911, p. 1.

³⁴ Ibid., 18 Mar. 1909, p. 8.

³⁵ Cotton cited a speech given by Bourassa at a Eucharist Congress of the Roman Catholic Church. Ibid., 29 Sept. 1910, p. 1.

have launched Quebec on the road that France had taken in 1789.³⁶ But as long as he insisted on "going back a thousand years and living in a dead age"³⁷ he was irrelevant to the age in which he lived.

Yet Cotton did concede that some contemporary Christians were not only aware of evil social conditions but were prepared to effect the moral precepts of "primitive" Christianity. A few of the resolutions passed by a Methodist congress held in Vancouver in the spring of 1910 drew guarded compliments from Cotton. He reported, without comment, that the congress had passed a resolution deploring the evil of commercial greed which caused men to oppress the unfortunate and forget their obligations to the higher interests of society.³⁸ He even praised the congress "for coming out in almost Marxian terms" when it passed a resolution which predicted that the tendency to trustification would eventually lead to the final trust,

36 Ibid., 5 Oct. 1911, p. 1.

37 Ibid., 17 June 1909, p. 8.

38 Ibid., 29 Sept. 1910, p. 4.

which, governed by forces in society, would ensure the enrichment not of the few, but of everyone.³⁹ He acknowledged that some Ontario Methodists were concerned about slums in Ontario cities and that a few of them had gone so far as to condemn the practice of sending missionaries abroad while conditions at home were so bad.⁴⁰

But the unwillingness of Christian reformers to apply scientific analysis to the study of societies and their refusal to recognize the existence of a class struggle was sufficient for Cotton to dismiss their reform efforts. At best, reforms such as better education for the poor, advocated by Bishop Ingram of London in a talk given to the Congress of the Anglican Church in Halifax in the summer of 1910, would allow "the more cunning wage slaves to escape slavery and climb to positions of authority among the slave drivers".⁴¹ In the last analysis it was impossible to bring about fundamental change by exhorting people to do good in a society where the largest rewards went to those who did the opposite.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 17 June 1909, p. 2.

⁴¹ Ibid., 6 Oct. 1910, p. 2.

⁴² Ibid.

Christianity, in Cotton's view, was a spent force.

It had been an important force for change in the period of history between Christ's death and its adoption by the Roman Empire as the state religion. It was impossible to recreate the primitive communism of early Christianity, as Cotton accused the Christian reformers of doing, because historical changes since then made such ideas hopelessly utopian.⁴³ It was still more difficult to revive the revolutionary instincts of Christianity because it was now identified with the oppressor not the oppressed. "The Churches are dead," he wrote, "and socialism alone is left to carry on the human work of Christ."⁴⁴

Cotton's response to Christianity was complex. There is no doubt that his admiration for Christ was genuine, based as it was on his own deep humanistic instincts. The disgust he felt at the spectacle of the ministers of God toadying to the wealthy bourgeoisie was a variation on the theme of his contempt for bourgeois society. But his dislike of militant Christian reform

⁴³ Ibid., 20 Apr. 1911, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 25 Mar. 1909, p. 1.

groups cannot be understood, as he would have it, simply by their refusal to acknowledge Marxian laws of historical development. As Richard Allen has shown,⁴⁵ Christian reform movements were flourishing during the years Cotton wrote his paper. Though Cotton never openly acknowledged the threat of the Christian reformers, his attacks suggest that he saw them as competitors for the same constituency. After all, Christian reformers agreed with Cotton that the enemy was entrenched wealth; both were attempting to arouse a working class awareness of the evils in the present order. Cotton could denounce the social gospel as being unscientific but he could not make it disappear and so had reason to fear it as a rival movement. The old churches might be deaf to the Christian call for social regeneration but there were some Christian militants who were not prepared to leave the field open to Marxian socialists. Still, the ideology of Christian reformism never posed an intellectual problem for Cotton. It was not difficult for a Marxist to dismiss its ideology as an essentially petty bourgeois attempt to forestall the movement of history. But its activity did threaten Cotton's

⁴⁵ R. Allen, The Social Passion, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1971, pp. 3 - 17.

efforts to develop a socialist movement. In this respect he had much to fear from reform Christianity. As it turned out, any fears that Cotton may have had were entirely warranted. Reform Christianity proved to be a much stronger force than Marxism in the development of the C.C.F. - N.D.P., the most important Canadian socialist movement.

CHAPTER IX

THE FARMER

The Fifth Census of Canada records that, in 1911, there were 714,646 "occupiers of farms" in Canada.¹ The size of the average Canadian farm was 153.85 acres² and its value was \$5,921.³ A comparison with the 1891 census figures reveals a number of interesting developments over the twenty year period. First, although the farm population increased by about fifteen per-cent⁴, it was well below the national increase of forty-five per-cent. With the exception of the

¹ Fifth Census of Canada, 1911, V.IV, Agriculture, 1914, p. XII.

² Ibid., p. XVI.

³ Ibid., p. XVIII.

⁴ Ibid., p. XII.

prairie provinces, where the increase was dramatic,⁵ farm population actually decreased. Ontario, which had the largest farm population in both years, lost twenty percent. In Quebec the number fell from 174,996 to 150,599, in Nova Scotia from 64,643 to 56,033.⁶

A second change in this period was a dramatic shift in the ratio of small to large farms. In 1891 there were 191,612 farms between five and ten acres in size and 52,976 over two hundred acres.⁷ In 1911 there were only 24,666 farms left in the first category whereas the number in the second category had increased to 132,931.⁸ The ratio of five to ten acre farms to farms over 200 acres had shifted from four to one in 1891 to one to six in 1911.

Thus the Census figures show that between 1891 and 1911 the national population had increased three times as fast as the farm population. Secondly, the proportion of small farms to large had undergone a dramatic reversal.

⁵ Ibid., e.g. Alberta's farm population increased from 2,577 to 61,496. p. XII.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. X.

⁸ Ibid.

Both points are important background to an analysis of Cotton's writings on Canadian farming.

In his book Die Agrarfarge, published in 1892, Karl Kautsky developed what was to become the agricultural policy of the German Social-Democratic Party. His aim in writing the book was to inquire whether Social-Democracy could realize its aim of socializing property in agriculture as well as in industry. On the basis of his study of the statistical evidence, he concluded that agrarian developments meant that agriculture needed more and more capital to operate profitably. Like the modern factory, the modern agricultural enterprise was a capitalist enterprise. In agriculture, as in industry, the large enterprise was technically superior to the small. The large farm was in a better position to rationalize production through the better use of manpower, implements, transportation, sales, credit, etc. One important consequence of the impact of modern capitalism on agriculture was the proletarianization of the peasant. Whether self-employed on rented land or simply a dependent labourer, the farmer more and more resembled the urban proletarian. His relations to the means of agricultural production closely resembled those of the worker to the machinery in his factory. The small farmer

was becoming more and more like the factory worker whose only saleable commodity was his labour power.⁹

Cotton agreed with Kautsky that technological change would make the small farm increasingly "inefficient and costly".¹⁰

The machine made farm is coming. The old order is passing. Formerly a man could work a piece of land with his own hands. But now the farmer must have expensive machinery.¹¹

He envisioned the day when "Giant machines will invade the fields and farming will become industrialized."¹² The process of technological change was already under way. The steam plow,¹³ the mechanical cotton picker,¹⁴ and government subsidized hydro-electricity¹⁵ were changing the methods of farming, making it more difficult for the

9 P. Gay, The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism, Collier Books, New York, 1962, p. 199-200.

10 C.W., 5 Jan. 1911, p. 2.

11 Ibid., 23 June 1910, p. 1.

12 Ibid., 30 Mar. 1911, p. 1.

13 Ibid., 20 Mar. 1911, p. 1.

14 Ibid., 15 Dec. 1910. p. 4.

15 Ibid., 16 Feb. 1911, p. 1. Cotton reported that the Ontario government was charging farmers only \$25 to \$30 p.a. for hydro.

small farmer to compete with the one able to afford the new machines. As machine farming became more profitable he predicted that capitalists would look to farming to invest. "With the industrialization of the farm the land capitalist will be identical with the industrial capitalist."¹⁶ Some farmers would rise into the ranks of the labour exploiter; the majority would sink into the ranks of the proletariat.¹⁷

An issue which Cotton believed would have an important bearing on the future of farming was the single tax. This reform, first publicized by Henry George, had a very wide appeal. His book, Progress and Poverty, was first published in 1879 and has appeared subsequently in 100 editions and sold over 3 million copies.¹⁸ Though George cannot be credited with originating the idea of the single tax, he did popularize it in a period of American history when the abundance of free land had all but run out.

¹⁶ Ibid., 15 Dec. 1910, p. 4.

¹⁷ Ibid., 23 June 1910, p. 1.

¹⁸ Sidney Lens, Radicalism in America, Thomas Crowell Co., New York, 1969, p. 177.

Briefly, George proposed levying a tax on land equal to the economic rent, that is on the increase in the value of the land from causes other than its improvement from the application of capital and/or labour. The tax was intended to penalize the land speculator who bought land in the hope that over a period of time its value would increase as lands adjacent to his were developed.¹⁹

Cotton noted that the single tax had won a measure of acceptance in Canada. Joseph Fells, a millionaire manufacturer of Naptha soap, had been travelling through Canada advocating its enactment. The Grain Growers association were supporting it and Vancouver was already using a single tax assessment.²⁰

To Cotton the significance of the single tax was not that it penalized land speculators but rather that it encouraged the full exploitation of land. Stable ownership of land that passed from one generation to another had been a characteristic of the feudal age. Unused land could be passed through the generations without penalty.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ C.W., 2 Feb. 1911, p. 4.

Capitalism, however, "finds it inconvenient to have stable ownership of land".²¹ In order to ensure the freedom of capitalist exploitation, "The ownership of land must be made to flow as freely as the ownership of bales of cotton and shares of companies".²² The single tax would do this, he argued, because no man who did not use his land for capitalist production could afford to hold it. Thus the single tax would destroy "the last remnants of the feudal stability of land ownership".²³

Cotton also believed that the single tax would make it more difficult for the hand farmer to survive. He, more than the machine farmer would have difficulty cultivating all his land. Poor to begin with, he would be forced to pay a tax on the unused portion of his land should it increase in value. Such a tax would help the process by which "the hand farmer will be gradually squeezed out by the machine farmer".²⁴

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

Cotton saw the farmer as a doomed social type, the little man threatened by the big interests. "Through politics the money powers have been able to make laws permitting them legally to rob you",²⁵ he warned the farmers. Three years later he used a speech given by R. B. Angus, President of the Bank of Montreal, to the Bank's ninety-fifth annual convention to make the criticism that the Bank's apparent concern for the farmer was a fraudulent one. In replying to criticism, which had apparently appeared in some papers, that the farmers were poorly served by the banks, Angus had said that there were over 2500 bank branches in Canada, most of them located in small towns and villages serving agricultural communities. The number of branches was not the issue, Cotton wrote. The farmers wanted cheaper money, not more banks. "The banks are prosperous but the plucked farmer is not."²⁶

In fact, the self employed farmer was really "a wage slave with apparently no boss. He works hard and gets

25 Ibid., 29 July 1909, p. 3.

26 Ibid., 19 Dec. 1912, p. 1.

little."²⁷ He was as exploited as any worker in mine, mill or factory. What separated the farmers from the workers were paper titles to lands given by the capitalists who then "robbed them through rent, interest and profit of the greater part of the wealth they get from the soil".²⁸ Under socialism the farmer would no longer be exploited by banks, railroads and manufacturers of farm implements. He would have shorter hours of work, be protected in his old age,²⁹ and receive the social value of the work he created.³⁰

But in spite of the abuses which the farmer suffered at the hands of the large capitalist interests, the fact remained that, under the Marxist doctrine, he formed no part of the proletariat. His ownership of land, from which he secured a profit, however small it might be, placed him in the bourgeoisie. Cotton acknowledged the problem, without admitting as much, when he described the self-employed farmer as "an anomaly in a capitalist system of production. He is combined worker and capitalist. He

27 Ibid., 15 Apr. 1909, p. 1.

28 Ibid., 19 Dec. 1912, p. 1.

29 Ibid., 26 Aug. 1909, p. 8.

30 Ibid., 19 Dec. 1912, p. 1.

is a worker owner of the means of wealth production."³¹

Although Cotton expressed some sympathy for the small farmer, he had no doubt that the rural sector would decline. Any movement, like that of the back to the farm movement in the U.S., was bound to fail.³² Some workers were leaving the cities to buy farms and, by virtue of ownership of means of production, becoming members of the capitalist class. So it was that the capitalist class gained at the expense of the proletariat, a trend "that has been hailed by some as the failure of socialism."³³ But lower prices, resulting from the increase in the amount of food produced, and the high rates charged by the transportation and cold storage trusts, would make it difficult for the farmer to realize wages, let alone interest, on his investment. "The farmer will find himself in very little better condition than the wage worker, if he is in as good shape."³⁴

31 Ibid., 30 Mar. 1911, p. 1.

32 Ibid., 14 July 1910, p. 2.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

As well, other factors were working against the farm. The attractions of city life - shorter hours, better schools, better entertainment - were drawing farmers away from the isolated life on the farm.³⁵ He reported that the Toronto Sun had written an article on the increasing number of small, abandoned farms in Ontario.³⁶ Furthermore, German and American census figures clearly showed that cities were growing at the expense of the country.³⁷

So while Cotton expressed sympathy for the lot of the small farmer, his belief that the iron law of technological development made his future untenable prevented him from giving the small farmer any support. The census figures gave substantial support to Cotton's analysis. However, the process worked more slowly than probably he expected. The farmers remained a very important political factor in the country. Attitudes like Cotton's were certainly not helpful in building farm-labour unity.

35 Ibid., 2 Mar. 1911, p. 2.

36 Ibid., 15 Dec. 1912, p. 4.

37 Ibid., 2 Mar. 1911, p. 2.

Cotton's attitude towards the future of the farmer stands in stark contrast to the policy the C.C.F. was to adopt in 1933. Article 4 of the Regina Manifesto supported "the security of the farmer upon his farm"³⁸ and outlined a number of provisions intended to ensure the survival and prosperity of the family farm. Here was a policy that was profoundly different from Cotton's attitude that the small farm had no future and merited no attention from socialists. The reasons for the difference are open to speculation. First, it is clear that, although he had readers in the Prairie provinces, Cotton never believed that the socialists had a political constituency among Western farmers. That constituency, such as it was, was to be found among the urban workers of British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec and among the miners of B.C., the Maritimes and Ontario. As for the C.C.F., prairie representatives were an important part of the party's membership.³⁹ Secondly,

³⁸ The Regina Manifesto, as found in W. Young, The Anatomy of a Party: The National C.C.F., The University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1969, p. 305.

³⁹ The United Farmers of Saskatchewan and the United Farmers of Alberta were two groups at the founding convention of the C.C.F. in Calgary in 1932. W. Young, Anatomy of A Party, p. 41.

Cotton wrote during a period when rapid economic and technological expansion made the future bright for the large, mechanized farm and dim for the under capitalized one. On the other hand, The Regina Manifesto was written in a period when the failure of capitalism and the stagnation of the economy made the survival of the family farm, supported by the state, a realistic prospect. Finally, there is a fundamental ideological difference. Cotton, a Kautskyite Marxist, believed that the inexorable law of technological development which was destroying the small farm was, in the long run, beneficent. For the destruction of the property owning bourgeois farming community was part of the process by which the proletariat class was expanded at the expense of the bourgeoisie. Such a process was an essential prelude to the successful socialist revolution. The C.C.F., however, despite its rhetorical defiance of capitalism, was essentially a reforming party intent on establishing a planned economy that would ensure, among other things, a fairer distribution of wealth within an economy that remained substantially capitalist. The party did not advocate a workers' take over of the means of production. Therefore the C.C.F. was able to contemplate

the future of the farmer free from the imperatives of the revolutionary theory that shaped Cotton's view of the farmer's future. It is in this ideological incompatibility that the fundamental reason for the different views of the farmer's future is to be found.

CHAPTER X

W A R

Despite evidence of a developing internationalism before 1914¹ there was a counter balance of evidence that showed increasing tension among the European powers resulting from a host of unregolved problems and conflicts of interest. The Anglo-German naval race, latent Franco-German hostility, Russian pan-slavism, Balkan nationalism, Austro-Serbian tension, gave rise to periodic crises such as the two Moroccan disputes, the Bosnian crisis and the Balkan wars which plagued European relations in the early years of the twentieth century. The final crisis - the

¹ "During the last three quarters of the nineteenth century over a thousand international congresses were held, all to further some form of social or economic co-operation... International organizations of socialists and trade unionists were well established." D. Thomson, Europe Since Napoleon, Knopf, New York, 1957, p. 502.

assassination in Sarajevo of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, on June 28, 1914 - set off the well known chain of events that ultimately brought all the European powers, except Italy, into conflict by early August 1914.

In the years before 1914 it was socialist orthodoxy that if war were to break out it would be the result of competition between capitalist countries for foreign markets. Cotton pointed out to his readers that one of the paradoxes of developing capitalism was that the development of more costly and complex machines increased production but at the same time forced small businessmen, unable to afford large capital expenditures, into the proletariat. Thus the domestic market was actually reduced at the very moment production was increasing. Capitalists were forced to look to foreign markets to sell their surplus goods. Competition between capitalist nations for foreign markets inevitably meant the development of armies and navies to protect existing markets and to search out new ones.²

² C.W., 27 Mar. 1917, p. 1:

As early as 1892 Kautsky had written in The Class Struggle,

... In the world market the capitalists of one nation meet those of others as competitors. In order to oppose these competitors they call upon their government to maintain their rights, or, better still to drive out their foreign competitors altogether. Thus as states and monarchs become more and more dependent on the capitalist class, armies and navies become more exclusively the tools of this class. Wars ... result from economic competition between the capitalists of different nations.³

Cotton's writing was virtually an echo of what Kautsky had written in The Class Struggle.

The illusive foreign market for the absorption of the unsold home surplus is being chased by every capitalist politician ... of Europe and America. That market cannot be found. Hence every nation is trying to steal the markets of every other nation. Algeria has been smashed over by the nations of Europe as a bone by a hungry dog.⁴

Although Cotton acknowledged that competition between capitalist nations might culminate in war, he was confident that, if war did begin, it would be short lived. He believed that the workers were "too intelligent to

³ K. Kautsky, The Class Struggle, p. 57.

⁴ Ibid., 9 Dec. 1909, p. 1.

fight for the master class against a foreign enemy".⁵ Revolutionary forces had almost succeeded in overthrowing Czarist rule during Russia's war with Japan in 1905. Socialist leaders had sworn to take action if their governments declared war. Keir Hardie had said that he would call out British workers. August Bebel, leader of the German Social-Democratic Party, had said that if the German government declared war he would call a general strike that would immobilize the German Army. "The German authorities fear to provoke war because a declaration of war under such conditions would be more ludicrous than serious."⁶

There is very little in the pages of Cotton's Weekly from August through December 1914 to give the reader a clear idea of what impact the outbreak of war had on Cotton. In the August 6th issue he wrote in a short item at the bottom right hand side of page one that war had broken out between Austria and Serbia. Although socialists in both countries were planning anti-war

⁵ C.W., 11 Mar. 1909, p. 1.

⁶ Ibid., 16 Dec. 1909, p. 1.

demonstrations, the parties were weak. Furthermore, he concluded, even in peaceful times anti-war demonstrations were frowned upon by the authorities. "In times of war they are stopped with brutality."⁷ The optimistic view that workers would prevent a war from occurring had changed abruptly to a mood of deep pessimism that nothing could be done.

The news that Germany, the country with the largest socialist party, had entered the war must have come as a great shock to Cotton. The news that the Social-Democratic Party had voted unanimously to support passage of war credits must have been a catastrophic blow. He never did try to explain why the Social-Democrats supported the German government. Intellectually and, perhaps, emotionally that was probably too difficult a task. He did try to explain Germany's involvement in the war. Although German Social-Democracy seemed to be very strong, appearances were deceptive. Germany was still essentially a feudal state, Catholic and reactionary, ruled by a

⁷ Ibid., 6 Aug. 1914, p. 1.

military caste which was able to maintain its power by exploiting the peasants. Social-Democracy had simply not been strong enough to break the feudal rule.⁸

The historic task of destroying the German feudal state would fall to England and France rather than German Social-Democracy.

The defeat of Germany is inevitable. When she is conquered her war machine will be dismantled ... the military and feudal caste will be destroyed by England and France.⁹

Once the military caste was destroyed a republic would be established. "A republican Germany with the economic basis of feudalism removed will be a fitting place for the class struggle to be fought."¹⁰ Cotton concluded his article:

We can look forward to a tremendous boom for socialism within the German Dominions and in all other countries when the war is over.¹¹

Cotton never attempted to give his readers a full explanation for the outbreak of war in 1914. He did write

8 Ibid., 20 Aug. 1914, p. 1.

9 Ibid., 26 Nov. 1914, p. 2.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

that socialists had hoped that, despite the arms build up, war would be averted. But that had obviously been a futile hope "at the present stage of working class development".¹² The implication was that, had the capitalist system been more developed and the proletariat more class conscious, war would not have broken out or, even had it broken out, the proletariat would not have fought. Perhaps so. However such an explanation left a major problem unexplored. Cotton was unable to bridge the inconsistency between his belief that the peaceful victory of the proletariat was inevitable once capitalism was fully developed and his conviction that war was the result of advanced capitalist countries competing with one another for the control of new markets. Cotton's inability to come to grips with this problem revealed a very real inadequacy in the Social-Democratic theory which he espoused.

The history of Cotton's Weekly after December 1914 is obscure. The last extant copy is dated December 10, 1914. Later that month the paper was moved to Toronto

¹² Ibid.

and continued to be published until its name was changed to the Canadian Forward.¹³ When Cotton's Weekly ceased being published and became the Canadian Forward is not known. The first issue of the Forward still available is dated October 28, 1916. It was managed by a Mr. A. Ackerley and called itself the official paper of the Social-Democratic Party of Canada.¹⁴

Cotton almost certainly severed his connection with Cotton's Weekly after the paper left Cowansville. During the war he worked in his brother's Montreal law office during the week and commuted to Cowansville to spend the weekends with his family. For about eighteen months during 1921 and 1922 he lived in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia and edited the Maritime Labour Herald. In the few remaining copies from the period of his editorship there is no indication of the socialist ideology he preached in Cotton's Weekly. He left Glace Bay in 1922 to return to law practice in Montreal and weekend residence in Cowansville. In the early thirties he returned to permanent

¹³ J.B. Ahlquist, "The Socialist Movement in Canada Before the War", The Worker, 27 Feb. 1926, p. 4.

¹⁴ The Canadian Forward, 28 Oct. 1916, p. 1.

residence in Cowansville, practised law briefly and then retired. He died in 1945 aged sixty-six.¹⁵

Apart from his brief spell as editor of the Maritime Labour Herald, Cotton's active involvement in socialism or any working class activity ended when Cotton's Weekly moved to Toronto at the end of 1914. Although he welcomed the Bolshevik victory in Russia he deplored the violence which followed it. Moreover he never could accept Lenin's claim to being a Marxist.¹⁶ Not only did he never join the Communist Party of Canada, he was appalled by the aggressive, authoritarian tactics used by the communists he met in Glace Bay.¹⁷ Cotton's brief tenure as editor of the Maritime Labour Herald was an indication that in the early twenties he was still intent on furthering the interests of the working class. But there was nothing in the paper that suggested that he was interested in anything much but the immediate problems of the Maritime working class. Certainly there was nothing that bears any resemblance to the socialism that Cotton

15 Interview with Richard Cotton, 2 July 1976.

16 Ibid.

17 Interview with Carl Cotton, 23 Nov. 1969.

preached in Cotton's Weekly. His active involvement in socialism ended in 1914. It is safe to say that his intellectual interest died at the same time or soon after.

CONCLUSION

William Cotton was a significant figure in Canadian socialism during the years 1908 to 1914. He was an active member of the Socialist Party of Canada, chairman of the founding convention of the Canadian Socialist Federation and a candidate in the 1911 federal election. By far his most significant contribution was Cotton's Weekly. For six years he not only published and edited his paper but contributed a major portion of the articles. It reached a national audience and, for a time, had a circulation as high as 30,000, an impressive achievement in the pre World War I period. In the pages of his paper Cotton advocated a particular socialist ideology and applied it to his analysis of Canadian society. Without doubt William Cotton was an important influence in defining and proselytizing Canadian socialism in the pre World War I period.

Cotton's writings belong to a period when the Canadian economy was experiencing a radical structural change. In the early years of the twentieth century industrialization was transforming the economy of small, often family owned, businesses which produced for a local market, to an economy of large corporations producing for a national market. The outlines of the new industrial order were clearly evident in the years Cotton published his paper. Large scale manufacturing, a labour force increasingly concentrated in mining and industrial centers, an organized labour movement, large retail stores were all relatively recent developments in Canada. To Cotton, they were harbingers of an even more profound transformation soon to come.

Cotton wrote for an audience which did not enjoy the benefits of Canada's great economic expansion in the early years of the twentieth century. Although these were prosperous times for some, the lot of the worker was "hard labour, low wages, long hours, accidents and unemployment".¹ Cotton discussed many aspects of Canadian society from a Marxist viewpoint and he preached a Marxist ideology which

¹ C. Lipton, The Trade Union Movement of Canada, p. 98.

told the worker that the dynamic growth which did not benefit him at the moment was the necessary prelude to a proletarian revolution. The revolution would usher in a world free of exploitation, where the security of one meant the security of all, where there was production for use, not profit, and where it would be "easy and prosperous to do right and difficult to do wrong".² In this world the qualities of love, friendship, honesty and nobility "long repressed and distorted by ... economic anarchy and competitive warfare would flourish".³ It would be a world that allowed every member of society "to develop the highest and best that is in him"⁴ and where a woman's role would be determined not by the accident of sex but by her capabilities and inclinations.⁵

His belief that the proletarian revolution was the inevitable outgrowth of a developed capitalist economy was the constant theme in Cotton's writings. He measured

2 C.W., 20 Apr. 1911, p. 1 .

3 Ibid., 5 Aug. 1909, p. 1.

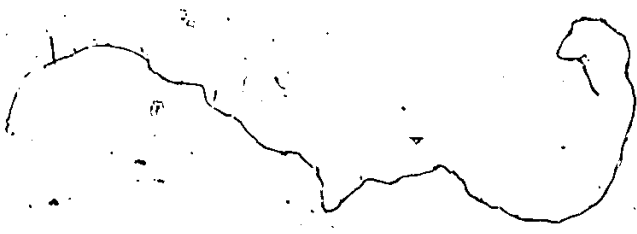
4 Ibid., 7 Oct. 1909, p. 8.

5 Ibid., 9 Sept. 1909, p. 7.

government policies, inventions, strikes, religious institutions, to name a few, against the criterion of the revolution. He looked with favour on anything that he believed hastened the advent of revolution and criticized anything which appeared to retard it. Thus, he welcomed the growth of trusts and dismissed the small merchants and businessmen as necessary victims of historical development. Industrial unions won his approval because they developed proletarian class consciousness, whereas craft unions did not because their exclusivity fragmented the proletariat. Even though he acknowledged that small farmers were as much victims of capitalist exploitation as the workers, he welcomed their extinction because their continued existence slowed the development of revolutionary conditions.

Cotton's view of Canadian society was shaped by his belief that the proletarian revolution was inevitable. He saw a society undergoing the change from an agrarian, local economy, to an industrial economy, national in scope. But, more significant for Cotton, it was a society in which the foundations were being laid for the inevitable proletarian revolution and the subsequent emergence of a socialist society. It was a society where the small businessman, merchant and farmer were gradually being

replaced by large corporations and trusts and where the majority of the dispossessed were joining the proletariat which was growing rapidly as the bourgeoisie diminished. The federal government, not yet the complete captive of the trusts, timidly attempted to forestall the concentration of capital by passing anti-combines legislation. But industrial development encouraged the concentration of capital and made such legislation futile. In Cotton's view, the growth in size and power of corporations like the C.P.R. was a salutary process because they would easily be transformed into the economic and political units of the socialist society. Moreover, the concentration of capital in fewer and fewer hands was making irrelevant the free enterprise values of individualism and competition. The exclusive craft unions, Cotton believed, were doomed to extinction as the jobs of skilled craftsmen were made obsolete by new technologies. They were being replaced by industrial unions which, by organizing all the workers in an industry in one union, helped the workers develop class consciousness, something, Cotton insisted, that craft unions could not do because they fragmented the working force. At some point, probably in the midst of an economic crisis of overproduction, a



socialist government would be elected and would then complete the transformation of the bourgeois society into the socialist. Such was Cotton's view of Canadian society and its prospect for revolution.

However, Cotton never wrote a coherent, integrated explanation of all aspects of Canadian society. His responsibilities as publisher and editor of a weekly paper left him little time to produce such a work. Secondly, he was essentially a critic who responded to the issues of the day from the Marxist viewpoint. As a result there were a number of problems arising from the application of the Marxist model to Canadian society with which Cotton never came to terms.

The reform issue was one of these. Were reforms an aid or a detriment to the cause of socialism? With some reforms the answer was easy; they simply propped up capitalism. For instance, he viewed nationalization of an industry, not as an indication of a move towards socialism, but rather as a sign that a government was prepared to salvage a capitalist industry, particularly, as in the case of a railway, where other industries were inconvenienced. Or, as in the case of government owned hydro electricity, nationalization indicated government's

intention to subsidize capitalist industry. He saw the anti-combines legislation as a reactionary measure to preserve a primitive, i.e., competitive, capitalism by slowing down the development of trusts. The Industrial Disputes Investigation Act was simply an invidious attempt by the Liberal government to fool the workers into believing there was a harmony of interest between capital and labour.

With other reforms Cotton had a good deal of difficulty. For instance, the eight-hour day was a reform which brought immediate benefits to the workers. Cotton supported the reform by arguing that increased leisure time would allow workers more opportunity to study the principles of socialism. Yet, was there not a danger that if too many such reforms were passed the workers could be seduced into believing that the capitalist system was capable of responding to their needs? Cotton apparently never asked himself this question.

Cotton was also vague on how the transition from the capitalist to the socialist society would occur. Only once did he refer to this problem and then it was to say that, once the Socialist Party captured power in Canada it would abolish the political state and establish a co-operative commonwealth in which each industry would become

a self governing unit.⁶ Cotton never did explain such things as at what point the state would be abolished, what problems he anticipated arising when it was abolished, or whether any central organization would replace the state.

When he talked about the abolition of the state in the period of transition, Cotton was out of step with Marxist thinking. Marx himself envisioned a period of transition during which there would be a new state based on the authority of the proletariat. This temporary state - Marx's famous dictatorship of the proletariat - would oversee the transition period but, as soon as that had been accomplished, it would disappear. For the state, in the Marxian conception, was an instrument of class domination and in a society where there were no classes the state would no longer be necessary. The problem left would be administration. In Marx's phrase "the government of men will give place to the administration of things".⁷ In his discussion of the transition, Engels echoed Marx and emphasized the point that "the state is not abolished;

⁶ Ibid., 26 May 1910, p. 4.

⁷ G.D.H. Cole, The Meaning of Marxism, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1964,

it dies out".⁸ Kautsky was almost as vague as Cotton when he wrote that the Socialist Party's aim was "to call the working class to conquer the political power to the end that, with its aid, they may change the state into a self-sufficing co-operative commonwealth".⁹

Cotton was never clear on what scale he expected the proletarian revolution to take place. His writings imply that he expected Canada would experience a revolution relatively uninfluenced by events in the outside world. Yet in discussing reciprocity he argued that it was in the best interests of the proletariat that Canada should become submerged in the American economy which was more developed than the Canadian and thus closer to experiencing a proletarian revolution. Since Cotton had no regard for Canadian nationalism -- Canada was "an artificial country thrown together by the B.N.A. Act",¹⁰ -- this was a logical idea. But Cotton never pursued the idea. He left unclear

⁸ F. Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" in A.P. Mendel (ed.), Essential Works of Marxism, Bantam, New York, 1961, p. 78, Engels' emphasis.

⁹ K. Kautsky, The Class Struggle, pp. 110-11.

¹⁰ C.W., 9 June 1919, p. 1.

whether he expected the revolution to come only when Canada was an integral part of the U.S.A. or whether he anticipated a uniquely Canadian revolution.

Equally unclear was his conception of Quebec's role in the proletarian revolution. Cotton believed that Quebec was distinct from the rest of Canada by virtue of being a feudal society and having a sense of national identity. But he never discussed the role Quebec would have in the proletarian revolution. Did he expect Quebec would become merged in the rest of Canada after experiencing a bourgeois revolution? Would this Quebec revolution occur before the proletarian revolution in the rest of Canada? Cotton never explained.

It was Karl Kautsky's interpretation of Marx, the so called orthodox Marxism of the German Social Democratic Party, which Cotton applied to Canadian society. Although it might seem strange that a German theorist should be the major intellectual influence on a Canadian socialist, there are a number of reasons that show the connection to be quite natural. Many of Kautsky's books were published in English by the Charles Kerr Co. of Chicago and were readily available to Cotton. Kautsky was the leading theorist of the most successful Marxist party of its day. Cotton

published his paper in a period when Canada was experiencing the dynamic industrial growth that Kautsky contended would lead eventually to the socialist revolution. Kautsky's emphasis on a constitutional transition to the socialist order could not have failed to impress Cotton who abhorred violence of any description. Finally, Kautsky's prediction that the socialist revolution would be achieved in democratic countries when a socialist party formed the government actually made more sense in Canada where responsible government existed than in Germany where it did not.

Cotton's attitude towards politics was strikingly passive. Although he did participate in the election of 1911 as a socialist candidate he was more concerned with using the election as a means for educating the proletariat than he was in winning a seat. Of course, such an attitude is a convenient refuge for the candidate who stands no chance of winning. But to stop at that explanation is to do Cotton an injustice. He sincerely believed that the objective conditions of capitalist development would create the conditions for the socialist revolution. He saw his task as primarily educational; his job was to teach workers that capitalism was the chief cause of their

misery and that the socialist revolution was their salvation. He was totally unlike his Russian contemporary Lenin who was committed to building a political party which would actively and consciously hurry on the revolution. Rather, he had some vague idea that some time in the future a socialist government would be elected that would somehow accomplish the necessary revolution.

Cotton became a socialist in 1908. His writings bear the imprint of a pre World War I Marxist viewpoint. As capitalism developed, it became increasingly inimical to the rational working of a society. Cotton's analysis was designed to show this irrational, temporary nature of capitalism and that a new rational order, socialism, would replace capitalism. But the ravages of World War I, the violence following the Bolshevik victory of 1917 and the ruthless crushing of the German socialist revolution of 1918 destroyed any notion that industrial societies would develop in a peaceful, orderly way towards socialism.

After 1918 Canadian socialism branched off in two very different directions. The Bolshevik victory resulted in many Canadian socialists looking to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as a model and to Lenin as the ideological authority. But Lenin's emphasis on the small,

highly centralized party organization actively working to seize power on behalf of the proletariat' was fundamentally different from Cotton's conception of the working class emancipating itself by electing a government which would oversee the transition from a capitalist to a socialist order. Like Lenin, Cotton wanted to see a proletarian revolution, but he wanted to see it accomplished by constitutional means.

The C.C.F. was the second significant socialist party to develop in Canada after 1918. Founded in 1932 by a coalition of intellectuals, farmers and representatives of labour, the party passed a program in 1933 which deplored the exploitation of one class by another¹¹ and promised that the party would not rest until capitalism had been eradicated.¹² But despite some radical rhetoric the persistent theme of the party platform was the orderly planning and running of the present capitalist economy by an elite group of managers. Like the C.C.F., Cotton

¹¹ The Regina Manifesto, Programme of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, adopted at the First National Convention held at Regina, Sask., July 1933, found in W.D. Young, The Anatomy of a Party, p. 304.

¹² Ibid., p. 313.

envisaged changes by constitutional means, but he wished to achieve a genuine proletarian revolution. Thus the socialist tradition which Cotton represented came to a full stop.

Although Cotton maintained an interest in the labour movement after the war, witness his work on the Maritime Labour Herald in the early twenties, for all intents his days as an active socialist ended in 1914 when Cotton's Weekly ceased publication. He was appalled by the violence of the Russian Revolution and, later, sickened by the Stalin purges.¹³ He evinced no interest in the C.C.F.¹⁴ He ceased to be active because socialism, as he understood it, was relegated to the scrap heap of history.

¹³ Interview, Richard Cotton.

¹⁴ Ibid.

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