

The Bunker Mentality, All in the Woodsworth Family Tradition



By Richard Sanders

James Shaver (JS) Woodsworth’s racist nativism was typical of his class and heritage. By artfully expressing and justifying the biases of Canadian culture, he captured the support of many progressives. His was a compassionate elitism, deeply rooted in a religious and political faith that preached love and loathing for those who were scorned as inferior.

Although J.S. Woodsworth was a patronising ethnocentric xenophobe, at least he came by it honestly. His mother and father both came from prestigious lineages that were deeply ensconced in the traditions of Anglo-Saxon superiority. The particularly virulent form of cultural narcissism that was passed down to him, promoted class loyalties to conserve the ancient powers of both church and state.

The Shavers

J.S. Woodsworth’s middle name, Shaver, is the anglicised version of his mother’s maiden name, Schaeffer, meaning “shepherd.” His mother, Josephine Shaver, was descended from Wilhelm Schaeffer, who came from Germany to the US in the 1700s. His son, John Shaver, was a loyal supporter of the British empire and fought with either the King’s Royal Regiment of New York,¹ or Butler’s Rangers, a loyalist regiment. After the empire loyalists were defeated in the American revolution, John Shaver fled to Upper Canada’s Niagara region where he soon received a large grant of land from the colonial government.

John’s son William became an affluent farmer with “patriarchal habits and demeanor.” Amassing 1,600 acres, he was

“one step below the ‘squirearchy’ on the social ladder.” As an “exemplary” Wesleyan,² he welcomed local Methodists to meet in his home and he willed enough land and money to build a new church.³

In 1830, William’s son Peter, at the tender age of 21, was able to buy a 100-acre farm called Applewood, in what is now downtown Etobicoke, in Toronto’s west end. The local historical society says “it is believed Peter was a magistrate for the Home District in 1843.”⁴ On July 14, 1843, the Governor of Upper Canada appointed Peter Shaver as magistrate for this district,⁵ which included all of what is now greater Toronto. Untrained in law, these Justices of the Peace were a law unto themselves. They “set tax rates, appointed county officials, paid salaries, enforced local regulations, held court,” and “were, in effect, the local...government.”⁶

As Tories, magistrates were loyal servants of the corrupt Family Compact which dominated the social, political and economic life of Upper Canada. As such, they were thoroughly despised by such rabble-rousers as William Lyon Mackenzie, leader of the 1837-1838 uprising. In 1833, he wrote that Magistrates “are frequently proved guilty of the most criminal outrages against the peace of the community” and “are encouraged in their disgraceful career—advanced and promoted to places of greater power and trust.”⁷

During the Upper Canada Rebellion, over 400 radicals were arrested and charged with insurrection and/or treason in the Home District alone.⁸ In sentencing, Magistrates mixed politics with absurd religious beliefs. Charges against Home-

District rebels said they did not have “the fear of God” in their “heart but...[were] moved and seduced by the instigation of the Devil.”⁹ This old chestnut was thrown at Louis Riel almost five decades later.¹⁰

None would dare impute such charges against devout Methodists like the Shavers. Peter and his brother George were trustees of Etobicoke’s first Methodist church.¹¹ Peter also allowed a young Methodist circuit rider to board at his farm. This is how Peter’s daughter Josephine met a certain, young “saddle-bag” preacher named James Woodsworth. They married in 1868 and their first child, J.S. Woodsworth, was born at the Applewood estate in 1874.¹² He grew up there, a captive of the Loyalist myths and religious narratives spun by both parents and their families.

James Woodsworth Sr.

Rev. James Woodsworth Sr. had a powerful influence on the beliefs of his namesake. In fact, James Jr. was groomed from an early age to follow in his father’s footsteps and to become a Methodist minister. After leading flocks in various Ontario churches, James Sr. was honoured to become the Superintendent of Methodist Missions for Canada’s four western provinces. This made him a shepherd of shepherds, responsible for guiding Methodist efforts to aid the expansion of Britain’s empire across the west. Holding this influential position for thirty years (1885-1915) made him “an enormously important figure in the history of the Canadian West.”¹³

James Sr.’s autobiography proudly described the Methodist church’s role in converting native peoples, who he vilified with epithets like “heathens” and “savage people.” His crusade to shepherd missionaries began in what he called the “troubled times” of the Northwest Rebellion. He reported how “very gratifying” it was, “especially to the Methodist Church, that the Indians under her care were united in their loyalty to Queen and country.”¹⁴

In describing the insurrection of 1885, James Sr. turned a blind eye to its real causes. Instead, his simple-minded, racist narrative laid all blame on the supposed propensity of Aboriginals to rely on senseless violence. “Many Indians and half-breeds,” said James Sr., “took to the warpath and attacked the whites.” Then, invoking sympathy for Canadian troops who faced such “great difficulty” and “much hardship” when crushing the Indian

rebellion, he noted that “[m]any lives were lost in this unfortunate disturbance.” But, he said, on “the other hand, much good resulted.” To J.S. Woodsworth’s father, the loss of lives was “good” because “disaffected half-breeds and rebellious Indians were taught a salutary lesson; they learned something of the strength of British rule, and likewise experienced something of its clemency and righteousness.”¹⁵

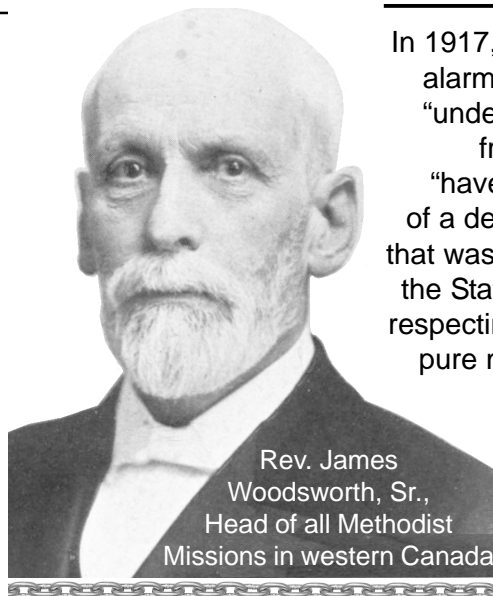
Canada’s ruthless military suppression of the uprising had other “salutary” results, he said. The “penetration of so many soldiers from the East into the heart of this great country served to advertise its resources.” When soldiers settled there, it meant “the North-West became better known and more highly appreciated.”¹⁶

The 1885 insurrection against Canada’s genocidal repression, land plunder and forced concentration of Indigenous peoples onto reservations, pitted Métis and Cree-Assiniboine First Nations not only against the imperial forces of Canadian troops and mounted police, but also against powerful civil-society institutions. Chief among these was the Methodist Church.

James Sr. also held extremely negative views of nonAnglos, especially Ukrainians. These prejudices were based in part on his extremist religious beliefs. In his 1917 memoirs, James Sr. warned that their “evil effects” were spreading. Ukrainians, he said, were “almost...destitute of any provision for their religious and spiritual training. The evil effects of this state of things are already being felt by other people in the vicinity.”¹⁷

J.S. Woodsworth was greatly influenced by his father’s righteous bigotry, especially towards aboriginals, Blacks and Ukrainians. This fact is noted in biographer Kenneth McNaught’s classic *A Prophet in Politics*, which commented on “the extent to which the nativism of the father had successfully rubbed off on the son. Although he would later moderate his views, J.S. Woodsworth never completely shed his early awkwardness and insensitivity towards blacks and Indians, and later, eastern Europeans. His stories...reveal a popular attitude at the time, that Indians were sinister, alien, and violent.”¹⁸

Similarly, Allen Mills’ biography notes that “in his early beliefs, James Shaver Woodsworth was very much the son of his father.” Mills, a political scientist at the University of Winnipeg, observed that “Clearly the germ of the social gospel as well as the nativism of J.S. Woodsworth derived from his father.”¹⁹



Rev. James Woodsworth, Sr., Head of all Methodist Missions in western Canada

This influence between generations seems to have flowed both ways. J.S. Woodsworth was, for example, responsible for the “final edit” of his father’s autobiography in 1917. Mills says that J.S. “claimed to have altered” his father’s book “in ways that he believed improved it.”²⁰

A core xenophobic belief shared by both father and son, was that Canada’s role as a beacon of Christian civilisation was threatened by the rapid influx of “undesirables.” These “strangers” could not, or would not, be assimilated fast enough. In discussing the flood of aliens entering Canada’s gates, James Sr. warned that:

“Christian people should watch this great movement, lest peoples of various nationalities, with various and conflicting moral and religious beliefs, and social sentiments, should come more rapidly than true assimilation can take place.”²¹

J.S. Woodsworth’s father saw Canada’s nation-building project as fundamentally religious. Canada, he said, is

“a nation whose foundations are laid in righteousness, whose people are the Lord’s, and whose pre-eminence because of righteous principles and conduct will ensure its prosperity and long-continued existence.”²²

In sounding the alarm about aliens, James the elder told terrifying tales of “certain classes from Central Europe” who:

“have brought with them the elements of a *destructive, anti-Christian Socialism*, whose presence and operation are *threatening the very foundations of the State*. This is recognised as so great a *peril* that the authorities at Washington are taking steps to limit immigration, hoping to at least reduce the percentage of these *undesirables*. The streams of immigration which during the last century have been so freely flowing into the neighboring Republic have set to-

In 1917, J.S. Woodsworth’s father raised the alarm about the “great...peril” posed by “undesirable” aliens. “[C]ertain classes from Central Europe,” he said, “have brought with them the elements of a destructive, anti-Christian Socialism,” that was “threatening the very foundations of the State.... [W]e hear more than whispers respecting the menace to good government, pure morality, and Christian progress...”

wards our fair land, and we shall soon be confronted with problems similar to those which so far have baffled the wisdom and skill of our sister nation. Already we hear more than whispers respecting *the menace to good government, pure morality, and Christian progress* which exists in what is acknowledged to be the *unassimilated elements*....”²³ (Emphasis added.)

James Sr.’s fear of a “destructive, *anti-Christian Socialism*” that was “*threatening the very foundations of the State*,” was also of grave concern to his son, J.S. But where did James Sr. acquire such a virulent animosity towards those who dared present a “*menace to good government*”? To answer this, we need to look back yet another generation to the powerful influence of James Sr.’s father.

Richard Woodsworth

In 1830, J.S. Woodsworth’s paternal grandfather, Richard Wood, changed his name to Woodsworth and emigrated from Yorkshire England to York,²⁴ the colonial capital of Upper Canada. Although never ordained—like his sons James and Richard W., and James’ son J.S.—Richard became well-known as a leader and lay minister in the Wesleyan Methodist church. An 1899 history of Toronto Methodism said of Richard Woodsworth that: “no man in the George Street church was more highly respected or wielded a greater influence.” And, Richard was listed first in this church’s “noble army of local preachers, class and prayer leaders.”²⁵

In the late 1830s, when York’s Methodists split over the struggle between Reformers and Upper Canada’s elitist Family Compact, Richard remained a “staunch loyalist.” He supported the colony’s Governor and backed the British Wesleyan church. Meanwhile, the independent Methodist Episcopal Church joined forces with the Reformers. As McNaught noted, “Richard received a sword to assist in the defence of [Governor] Sir Francis Bond Head.”²⁶ On this, Mills remarked that “his grandfather’s sword, raised in an-

ger in 1837 against William Lyon Mackenzie's insurrection, was later prominently displayed on the wall of his [J.S. Woodsworth's] home in Winnipeg."²⁷

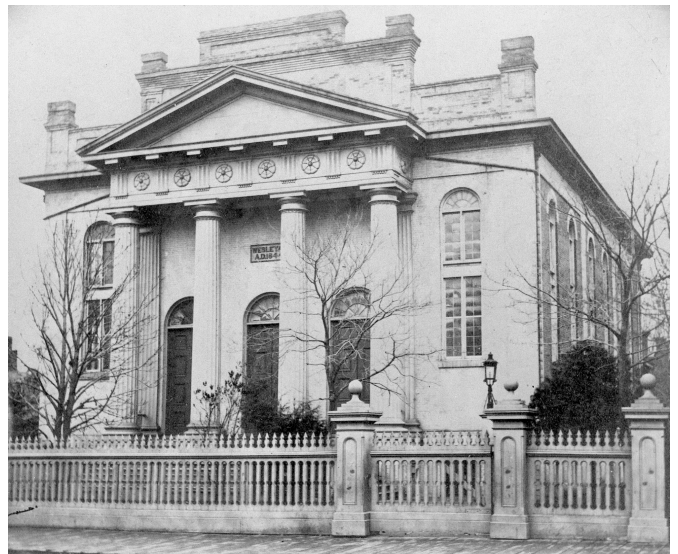
Richard's sword was given to him so that he would help suppress the uprising against Lt. Gov. Sir Francis Bond Head, a British Army veteran (1811-1825) who began ruling Upper Canada in 1836. Soon after arriving from England, Head dissolved Parliament and called an election.²⁸ Backed by the colonial elite and wealthy empire loyalists"—like the Shavers, and the Woodsworths of the Wesleyan Methodist church—Head faced reformers and rebels who demanded "responsible government." They opposed the Family Compact's system of patronage which allied bankers, businessmen, politicians and corrupt officials, with the state's repressive forces of "law and order." To fight the rebels, Bond's troops handed out weapons to vigilants who remained fiercely loyal to the Empire and its corrupt local elite.

In their biographies of J.S. Woodsworth, neither Mills nor McNaught shed much light on Richard's loyalist sword. For details we must turn to the earliest records of a Loyalist force called the British American Fire Co. (BAFC). Its records show that in April 1837, Richard Woodsworth became the BAFC's "First Lieutenant."²⁹ This fire brigade was backed by about fifty of York's most prominent men, including Family Compact leaders Archdeacon John Strachan, John Elmsley, Jr. and William Allan. The latter, who governed the BAFC, was a banker, businessman and Tory official who has been called "the financial genius of the ruling Family Compact,...one of the two or three richest men in the province,"³⁰ and "the unquestioned doyen of Upper Canadian business."³¹

It is no wonder then that Richard Woodsworth, and others in the Loyalist BAFC, vowed to help crush the uprising. On December 5, 1837, "the city was alarmed by the ringing of the fire bell" which warned that the rebels were approaching. The brigade's records report its unanimous resolve "to take up arms as an independent volunteer company to resist the attempt of traitors and rebels to invade our rights and disturb our peace."³²

Like other Empire Loyalists eager to take up arms to protect the Family Compact, the BAFC gathered at City Hall. It was there, at the start of the Rebellion, that James Ashfield, a gunsmith like his father, had "the duty of putting in order and serving out to the volunteers the muskets and

J.S. Woodsworth's grandfather, Richard, was a wealthy Methodist architect and builder in York. When his church split over the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion, he designed a new church for those remaining loyal to the corrupt "Family Compact." The sword that Richard received to fight the rebels was later displayed with pride in J.S. Woodsworth's Winnipeg home. Richard also received a lucrative 1840 contract to construct a new garrison at Fort York. This fort, which imperial forces had used to crush the rebellion, later became an internment facility during the WWI-Red Scare of 1914-1920.



This Empire Loyalist church, that Richard Woodsworth built in York's financial district, was one of Canada's most influential Methodist churches.

small arms."³³ "Fighting Tory" Richard Woodsworth may have received his sword from Ashfield, who became the Fire Brigade chief, a City Councillor and leader of the Orange Lodge (a Masonic-style order of Anglo-Protestant supremacists).

BAFC minutes show that Richard Woodsworth was active throughout the rebellion, moving and seconding motions and, no doubt, taking part in company duties which included "patrolling the streets... [to] arrest suspicious persons." When 700-800 rebels approached, the BAFC was "ordered...to give them a warm reception" and "with great spirit" they did, "most of them with muskets in their hands."³⁴

Woodsworth's closest comrades in arms within the BAFC brigade were Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Storm. All three were prominent in York's building trade. In 1840, these three Loyalists were rewarded with "a contract for the erection of the new garrison,"³⁵ New Fort York. The old fort was the base used to quell the rebels. (Later, during WWI, the fort's Barracks—built by Woodsworth *et al*—were used to intern the Germans and Ukrainians being sent to forced labour camps.)³⁶

Woodsworth, Storm and Hamilton were also all prominent members in the same church. When the Methodists were irreconcilably split over the rebellion, Richard designed and built the new Richmond St. church in York (Toronto) for the Loyalist Wesleyan faction.³⁷ Erected in 1844, in the financial district, it was perhaps "the largest and most influential Wesleyan Methodist church in Canada."³⁸

J.S.: The Anti-Marxist Socialist

Like his mother's and father's loyalist forebears, J.S. Woodsworth helped to quell the rise of rebellious radicals. In the years leading up to WWI, Woodsworth used his status as a rising star of the Social Gospel to shepherd public opinion about the supposed danger that certain immigrants posed to Canada's Christian civilisation. His fear-filled musings about unassimilable aliens targeted east Europeans, who were the bogeyman of choice among Canada's political, corporate and religious elites.

During Russia's 1917 revolution, Woodsworth finished his government report on *Ukrainian Rural Communities*. Its conclusion, "The Ukrainian as seen by Canadian Protestant Missionaries," quoted Methodist missionaries who were trying to convert Ukrainians in northern Alberta. The first of these epistles, by Rev. C.H. Lawford, warned of a looming menace. "The great danger," he said, "is that these people, in their efforts for 'freedom' will drift into Socialism, for socialistic literature is coming into every settlement."³⁹ Lawford used this threat to request more Methodist tracts for distribution to Ukrainians falling prey to dreaded "Socialism."

Historian George Emery noted that "Methodist hostility to socialism... confirmed labour and socialist spokesmen in the opinion that the church was the adjunct of the monied classes." Some churchmen saw "socialism as part of the un-Canadian cultural baggage which the foreign immigrant imported from his European background" and which should "be eliminated

in the course of...assimilation.”⁴⁰

By using Lawford’s letter, Woodsworth betrayed his own biases. Both men had graduated in 1896 from the Methodist Church’s Wesley College, Canada’s centre for training in the Social Gospel. (See pp.26-28.) Emery said Lawford “seemed unable to surmount a personal dislike for the Ukrainians.” Lawford said he feared they might have “a most baneful influence on our nation throughout.”⁴¹ Emery outlined Lawford’s efforts to use Methodism to convert, and free, Ukrainians from their Catholic and Orthodox faiths. Lawford disliked Ukrainian priests saying they exerted a bondage over their flocks that was “worse than any African slavery.”⁴²

Woodsworth’s report on Ukrainians, included a 1911 letter from Rev. W.H. Pike who, like Woodsworth, had graduated from the Methodist’s Victoria College in Toronto.⁴³ Pike’s letter said he entered an Edmonton dance hall to gather intelligence on Ukrainian youth culture. In describing a man there, Pike says he “led him on to tell me of their ideas and ideals.” Pike described the youth’s “desire for a life of freedom from priest-craft, from shallowness and hypocrisy, from fear of purgatory and divine wrath.” Methodists like Pike and Woodsworth shared this young man’s critique of Ukrainian churches. However, they were even more irked when young Ukrainians—like this dance-hall youth—

embraced atheist socialism by saying that: “we have come to Canada and we are going to be free; it’s a free country and we are not going to be slaves of priests or pope or church.... The best thing for us is socialism.”⁴⁴

In *Five Missionary Minutes* (1912), Pike voiced his fear of Ukrainian socialists. “How are we going to deal with the type of Socialism we find among these people?” he asked. “It is a mixture of socialism, infidelity, and Christianity. They have a false idea of freedom and throw off all religious restraint.”⁴⁵ (J.S. said he was “indebted” to Pike “for assisting in the intensive study of farms in selected districts.”⁴⁶)

Woodsworth’s virulent contempt for Marxism, and for the atheist strain of socialism, was an ideology he shared with Canada’s political, corporate and religious elites. He was, “of course... [an] anti-Marxist and anti-Communist,”⁴⁷ who defined his politics “in contradistinction to Marxism,” said Mills. “At the bottom of his quarrel with Marxism was a disagreement over the nature of economic class.”⁴⁸

Woodsworth was hostile to the Marxist narrative that social change is won through “class struggle.” To Woodsworth, success came by finding common ground with one’s adversaries. Although he always pushed for cooperation between rival classes, like workers and bosses, he refused to allow any cooperation with Marxist so-

cialists. He even opposed forming a “common front” with them against Fascism.

Just as Woodsworth derided Marxist narratives, communists spent decades criticising his compromising brand of bourgeois socialism. In 1919, an activist with BC’s radical Socialist Party called his theories “consummate twaddle.”⁴⁹ A decade later, the Communist Party (CP) labelled him a “Pacifist Flunkey of the Ruling Class.”⁵⁰ In 1932, renowned Canadian poet Dorothy Livesay echoed the CP narrative that his watered-down, “pink” socialism made bedfellows of “Capital and Labor.”⁵¹

In 1934, Woodsworth dissolved the Ontario CCF for cooperating with the Canadian Labour Defence League (CLDL).⁵² With 350 branches and 17,000 members by 1933, the CLDL defended militant unionists in court. It also collected 459,000 signatures to repeal Section 98, a repressive law used to intern radicals, including leaders of the CP.⁵³ (See pp.42, 45.)

While some Woodsworth fans are inspired by Marxist ideals, Mills said this shows how “myth can embroider reality, for Woodsworth was, of course, a militant anti-Marxist.”⁵⁴ “Discovering the ‘real’ Woodsworth requires putting aside myth,” said Mills, to get “beyond the hagiography which masquerades as biography.”⁵⁵

Mills’ own book on Woodsworth is a case in point. He used much sophistry to argue that Woodsworth was not a racist.⁵⁶

The Next Generation: Charles Woodsworth, Our Man in Saigon

By Richard Sanders

In exploring the Woodsworth family tradition of cooperating with empire, it is worth examining the career J.S. Woodsworth’s oldest son. Born in 1909, Charles grew up to be editor-in-chief of the *Ottawa Citizen* (1948-1955). But besides being the paper’s key gatekeeper, he also made it into the news.

In 1949, after the ethnic cleansing of 957,000 Palestinians from their homeland,¹ Woodsworth went to Israel. He praised it as a “democratic” and “progressive socialist state” leading “a social revolution...long overdue in the Middle East,” which he called “one of the most backward areas in the world.” Israel, he said, “could not afford” to “absorb the 250,000 Arab refugees...inside her borders.”² He praised heavily-fortified *kibbutzim* that, “like stockade[s] against Red Indians,... guard colonizers and defend Jewish homeland against enemies.”³

Woodsworth was a Cold Warrior. In 1952, he told the Canadian Citizenship

Council (CCC): “Let us not try to minimize the dangers of Communism.... Let us see it for the reactionary and brutal thing it is.”⁴ During the 1950s and 60s, the CCC was an agency of assimilation funded by the government’s right-wing, Citizenship Branch. (The Branch sought “the integration of new immigrants, ethnic minorities, and Indians.”⁵ See p.47.)

Charles soon became a diplomat. After a posting to the US (1956-1960), he became Canada’s point man on the International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICSC) in Saigon (1960-1961).⁶ In *Quiet Complicity: Canadian Involvement in the Vietnam War*, Victor Levant said Canada’s role on the ICSC was “characterised by partisan voting, wilful distortion of fact, and complicity in US violations of both the Geneva and Paris agreements.”⁷ Woodsworth’s duplicity in this charade was revealed by the US Ambassador to Saigon in a secret cable describing Woodsworth’s detailed suggestions on how US troops and war materials should

be smuggled into Vietnam without alerting the international commission overseeing the ceasefire.⁸

Charles Woodsworth later served Canada as ambassador to South Africa, Ethiopia, Somalia and Madagascar.

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7. Victor Levant, *Quiet Complicity: Cdn. Involvement in Vietnam War*, 1986, p.2.
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In 1999, another biographer, McNaught, said that in his 1959 biography of Woodsworth: "I did err in glossing over some frailties in Woodsworth. He was..., by today's judgement, a racist...."⁵⁷

Confined by Hero Myths

In his 2013 MA thesis on the "Myth and the Reality" of J.S. Woodsworth, Eric MacDonald described how biographers selected "different historical events to gloss over and misrepresent in order to cast Woodsworth as an even greater hero." Because each writer crafted "a more compelling character for the period, and a more captivating story," the Woodsworth "mythology has placed the narrative above... historical accuracy." Narratives about Woodsworth, said MacDonald, "created the impression of a messianic character, who represented all the hopes and ideals of the nascent Canadian political left." This "admiration" for Woodsworth, he said, "morphed into exultation and exaggeration."⁵⁸

Biographers have been among the most important information gatekeepers of the Woodsworth hero cult. This cult uses the Woodsworth brand to create a group identity for progressives in the CCF-NDP tradition. The success of this mythmaking has required that adherents ignore Woodsworth's flaws, and also overlook any positive features of his radical socialist rivals.

In discussing the core of Woodsworth's longstanding opposition to Marxism, Mills made this observation:

"He did not hold that human beings were *captives of their class status or historical conditions*.... (Woodsworth probably believed that, since he had *extricated himself from the professional middle class*, his own life was an illustration of this principle.)"⁵⁹ (Emphasis added.)

While some people *are* able to free themselves from the shackles of their religious, political and class biases, Woodsworth's success in this personal struggle is debatable. And, it is certainly far from clear that Woodsworth ever "*extricated himself from the professional middle class*," as claimed. Neither is it clear that he was able to fully escape the outdated delusions of Anglo-Protestant superiority that had secured his forebears' loyalty to successive Canadian elites. One certainty however is that Woodsworth *did* remain a loyal, life-long captive of the fervent, anti-Red phobia that has long informed a diverse array of Canadian political and religious narratives, from those employed by the radical right to the those of the progressive left.

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