

The Peacock and the Guinea Hen: Political Profiles of Dorothy Gretchen Steeves and Grace MacInnis

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In the wake of suffrage victories, many early twentieth century Canadian women worked hard to make that equality meaningful and to extend it to all areas of women's lives. For those who predicted great changes, however, too few took their hard-earned rights further than the polling station. Most expressed their concerns and goals within the more familiar world of women's organizations. Dorothy Steeves and Grace MacInnis were among the notable exceptions. While maintaining important ties with women's groups, they sought and won public office, pioneering important paths for generations of Canadian women to follow. These political trail blazers stand out for another important reason. They chose to establish their careers and test their political rights in a socialist party--the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF)--pledged to sexual emancipation and equal opportunities for women. They were, in short, dual rebels--as feminists and socialists--in a sex and class-ordered world.

Canada's third party gave these two women a very warm reception. Both emerged as leaders within the British Columbia CCF after a relatively brief apprenticeship. But the championing of both causes was at the same time theoretically and, in practice, arduous. In a fashion resembling socialist parties elsewhere, the CCF had difficulty living up to its promise of sexual egalitarianism. When class aspirations clashed with gender ones, the latter suffered. Nor did the majority of women within the party take the "great leap forward" which socialist theory forecasted.

Party priorities clearly affected Steeves' and MacInnis' options and influenced the ways in which they investigated their loyalties to class and sex. A discussion of the CCF's position on class and sex issues, however, is beyond the scope of this essay. Rather, it focuses on personal attitudes and experiences which inspired their career paths and approach to socialist and

feminist causes. The political profiles which follow should, nevertheless, be understood within the larger context of the CCF's half-hearted commitment to sexual equality.

When Grace MacInnis first met Gretchen Steeves, a Dutch immigrant, in 1932, she was impressed with Steeves' European *savoir-faire* and knowledge of a "great many things which didn't exist in Canada at the time."¹ Steeves' quick mind and strong public presence convinced MacInnis that this woman could win the respect of many. MacInnis' first impression proved correct. Upon the public platform, Steeves' sharp intellect, penetrating style and broad education won considerable respect, including that of British Columbia's voters who in 1934 elected her to the provincial house. Steeves' political skill and flair proved most attractive to a young political party challenging the status quo. Francis Aldman of the *Vancouver Province* agreed, writing in 1936: "No other member of the legislature can match her brevity and forcefulness...she is probably the most effective member in the present Provincial Parliament."²

Several years later, Aldman presented a similar assessment of another female MLA who likewise offered much to the young CCF. This time Grace MacInnis received the commendation. He noted: "She is an instinctive politician, a tower of strength to the opposition...Mrs. MacInnis is the equal of any and none are ever quite ready to engage in a battle of wits."³

As these observations suggest, Steeves and MacInnis were a good match. Although less aggressive in public approach, MacInnis possessed the very intellectual capacity, charismatic appeal, and political acumen she had so generously admired in Steeves. Equally important, she had the drive and courage necessary to exercise her talents. Indeed, like her CCF sister, once immersed in active politics she took to it, as she put it, "like a duck to water and never looked back."⁴

Colin Cameron, a close associate of both during the party's early history, once remarked to MacInnis: "You are like a guinea hen scratching around the Legislature."⁵ Thriving on public controversy and debate, Steeves particularly relished the limelight and shone on stage. MacInnis, on the other hand, enjoyed behind-the-scenes decision-making and though a strong speaker, was a backroom politician *par excellence*. Still, as this brief portrait of their respective careers demonstrates through its delineation of their paths to power and its analysis of their socialist and feminist goals, the "peacock" and the "guinea hen" were fundamentally birds of the same feather.

Dorothy Gretchen Biersteker was born on May 26, 1891, in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, the first of three children and the only daughter of a Dutch physician and British school teacher. The Bierstekers enjoyed the traditions, prosperity and comforts of Dutch professionals and were thus able to offer their new daughter a secure and intellectually rich home environment. Household servants attended to the family's domestic needs, leaving ample time for cultural, recreational and above all, academic pursuits. Gretchen took full advantage of her class privileges, developing a curious and critical intellect throughout her childhood and adolescence.⁶

Like most upper middle-class parents in Holland, the Bierstekers

encouraged, indeed presumed, that all their children would receive post-secondary education. They made no distinction between their daughter and two sons. Gretchen thus followed the route of most wealthy and bright Dutch children, attending the classical "gymnasium" stream in high school and upon graduation, entering university. Her particular aptitude for complex analysis guided her to professional training in law and economics and in 1916 she graduated *cum laude* from the University of Leiden.⁷

Shortly after receiving her law degree, she worked as a barrister for a law firm in Amsterdam. Her apprenticeship there, however, was short lived. A family move, soon after, took her to Den Haag (The Hague), Holland's capital and center of national government. But her work for a private law firm there was again brief. After only six months in the capital, she was appointed to the Dutch Government's Wartime Prices and Trade Board, a position most appealing to a talented, ambitious and increasingly politically conscious young lawyer.

Employment in the civil service during the war years was indeed challenging. Her energies were nevertheless spent on more than her professional responsibilities. A growing concern with social injustice and an increasing appetite for public affairs, whetted in university, led to membership in the Socialist Party of Holland as well as to two other fast growing movements in the second decade of the twentieth century: the women's suffrage movement and the peace movement.

Gretchen's youthful enthusiasm for the socialist cause did not lead, however, to an especially profound commitment to the party. She focused greater attention on suffrage and pacifism. In fact, the Socialist Party's endorsement of female enfranchisement influenced her decision to join party ranks.⁸ Yet, once again, her involvement in both, which was prominent enough to include public lectures, was not terribly systematic. Not until she was fully immersed in a more practical, less comfortable and less affluent world, did the young lawyer seriously commit herself to the collective process of social change, to the cooperative building of a new social order.

The event most immediately responsible for Gretchen's move to an environment which was to nurture a more profound political, social and feminist consciousness, was that which altered the lives of not a few young Dutch women at the end of the Great War: marriage to a Canadian POW, Rupert Steeves. Unsure of what to expect, like most young war brides, she was carried on a romantic cloud of excitement and new adventure. The adventure and challenge ahead, however, was not quite the kind the new Mrs. Steeves had anticipated. The "primitive cultural conditions"⁹ she witnessed during her endless train trek across Canadian cities, mountains, farms and wilderness disappointed the more sophisticated European. When she finally reached the coast in the winter of 1919, her enthusiasm was, at best, markedly circumscribed. Faced with tasks she had always counted on servants to perform, and appliances like a wood stove "with no clue how you lit the damn thing,"¹⁰ romance dissipated and reality set in with a vengeance. One letter written to her mother shortly after her arrival encapsulates her dismay over the isolation and primitiveness of British Columbia culture. Particularly

outstanding is her disdain for those women whom she considered slaves to a maternal and domestic identity.

After a brief but precise description of her tedious journey on the CNR, which included a stopover in Toronto at "the first civilized house I'd got to since I came to Canada...where there were nice servants" she announced:

I shall start housekeeping without a servant but have a Japanese woman if I can a couple of times a week to clean up...if needs be myself to pay her. I'm not going to become a drudge like most Canadian women; they look either dowdy or flashy; there is not one simple aristocratic well-dressed English woman among them.¹¹

Household management did take up much of Steeves' first few years in Canada. But, true to her vow, she did not become the household drudge she despised. She maintained an unusually active role in the community and for a brief time in the wage labour force as a legal advisor to the Dutch Consulate.

The birth of her son, Hughie, approximately a year after her arrival in Canada terminated her wage work. She continued her active interest in voluntary bodies, however, always with an eye to greater public activity once she was free of early child-care responsibilities. From 1926 to 1929, for example, she served on the Point Grey Town Planning Commission,¹² aware, perhaps, that such work would train her for larger community and social planning.

The opportunity to engage in larger community planning and more visible public activity arose during the second decade of Steeves' life in Canada. The devastation of the Depression pushed Steeves into the public arena, in particular, into socialist politics. Her initial response was to help transform the informal left-wing study group to which she belonged into a more formal organization called the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR). Like similar groups forming across the country at the time, the LSR was composed of left-wing and progressive intellectuals and academics interested in a solution to the social and economic chaos of the 1930s. When the CCF was formed a short while later, it was evident, as Steeves recollected years later, that "it (the CCF) was the answer."¹³ To prepare for affiliation, in 1932, the LSR transformed itself into the Reconstruction Party (RP). "Its platform was mildly socialist, but avoided the rigid Marxian terms of the Socialist Party."¹⁴

In 1933, the RP affiliated with the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC). Later that year, the RP further expanded its base through amalgamation with a loosely knit group of left-wing reform clubs collectively called the CCF Clubs. Together they formed the Associated CCF Clubs of British Columbia. Finally, in 1935, almost two years after affiliation, the Associated CCF Clubs and the SPC of British Columbia merged to become the British Columbia section of the CCF, a full-fledged member of the federal party.

As key contributor to the organization of the RP and to its affiliation with the SPC, Steeves, along with two other RP colleagues, Mildred Ousterhout and Frank MacKenzie, was invited to represent her group's

interests at the first national convention in Regina in 1933. Her experience there was inspiring. From that point, there was no turning back. Challenged to help create a strong and viable third party alternative for British Columbia and Canada's citizens, she returned to Vancouver convinced, as Ousterhout remembered, that "we were going to bring about great changes in our time."¹⁵ Before long, she ran for provincial office and in a 1934 North Vancouver by-election, on a CCF slate, she was elected to the British Columbia Legislative Assembly.

In the provincial House, Steeves was an outspoken politician, respected and, to some extent, feared. As a socialist, she had no tolerance for class privilege. As a strong, fiercely independent woman she also had little time for discrimination on the basis of her sex. Evidence of either met with her wrath, and as Bruce Hutchinson of the Vancouver *Sun* noted in his assessment of Steeves' first speech, her anger was not easily dismissed:

Mrs. Steeves dispelled the boredom which threatens the house with a flash of wit, a certain feminine charm, a penetrating satire, sharp as a razor and a burst of indignation such as we have seldom heard...What Mrs. Steeves said was a well-bred sneer at everything, a cry from the depths, for make no mistake about the sincerity of her protests, the bitterness of her hate.¹⁶

Most observers of Steeves' years in government and office remember her love for the platform--her passion for a stage to express her views and for an audience to absorb them. Many similarly often recall the sharp voice, at times filled with venom, which could easily intimidate those she challenged. Her friends and colleagues who knew her best, however, also remember her well-planned legislative contributions, the two most outstanding being her instrumental role in the introduction of housing cooperatives and Credit Union legislation. In 1937, for example, she introduced the first Credit Union Act, inspiring Harold Winch, the CCF's Provincial Leader, to call Steeves the "Mother of Credit Unions."¹⁷ Nor can these contemporaries forget her fight for better employment, education, and social welfare or her ceaseless championing of women's rights. One of her favourite bills for this period in fact called for the inclusion of domestic servants, "the most exploited class of workers," in minimum wage laws.¹⁸ She clearly had come a long way from the uppity war bride who first greeted Canadian shores.

Steeves' legislative activities were not restricted to home-based ills. She also shared her knowledge of and concern over international issues with the government and members of the House. Well versed in international law and economics, she excelled when she addressed these matters. Yet her "radical" opinions and what, to many, were shocking proposals on foreign policy also roused the greatest opposition. Though Steeves could champion a fairly moderate approach to domestic issues, she largely rejected compromise on international matters. She could accept the need for immediate domestic reform, but to cooperate with capitalist parties on international policies would be to deny fundamental socialist principles. While others increasingly compromised, she steadily abandoned the Fabian socialism which inspired her early plunge into politics. As Jessie Mendels, CCF Caucus Secretary in

the 1940s, aptly concluded, "with Gretchen it was a constant radicalization of her ideas."¹⁹ Together with her colleague and close friend, Colin Cameron, Steeves emerged as the intellectual leader of the British Columbia CCF's left. Steeves' impatience with those adopting a more moderate stance was particularly evident in 1939 when, in the Provincial Assembly, she and Cameron lashed out at all those supporting Canada's participation in World War Two, including her own party. It was not only the aggressor nations who were the enemy, she argued, but those who refused to abandon capitalist production practices and exploitive profit motives. To members of the House, caught in the fervour of a war to save democracy, her words were treasonous. In fact, according to Harold Winch, CCF House Leader, she and Cameron came to within a hair of being charged with treason.

Nor did members of her party welcome her remarks. Some considered them treasonous, if not to the country, then certainly to the Party. Grace MacInnis was among these critics and had this not uncommon reaction: "...I believe that while Mrs. Steeves' speech was pleasing to many members of the CCF, it did considerable damage to our cause both within and outside the movement."²⁰

In the interests of party unity, Steeves refrained from further public pronouncements on the war. Her cooperation coupled with the otherwise high level of respect she had previously won from both provincial and federal members eased somewhat the tension and division which had erupted. This awkward incident, however, marked the beginning of an uneasy relationship between Steeves and those who, like Grace MacInnis, held more moderate views.

The Liberal-Conservative coalition opposing the CCF in the 1945 provincial election defeated many CCF MLAs. Gretchen Steeves was among them. She never again sat in the Legislature nor, with the exception of a year's membership on the Vancouver Parks Board, did she ever manage to sit in civic or national government. But her electoral setbacks did not weaken her commitment to socialist causes or the CCF. Refusing to retire, she turned her energy and attention to internal organizational work. She served, for instance, on the BC CCF's provincial council as vice-president in 1949 and president in 1950, sat on the National Council and devoted considerable amounts of time and attention to the editorship of the *CCF News*.

Within the narrower, yet still significant, arena of internal party politics, Steeves seized all opportunities to move party policy and practice in a leftward direction. To meet the demands of common people, the party needed forthright socialist policies. Her editorials frequently criticized doctrinal moderation while her public addresses barely hid the contempt she felt for those advancing gradualist policies. For, in Steeves' view, the CCF was becoming complacent when it needed to be stronger than ever. A letter written in October 1955 clearly illustrates her deepening disillusionment. She wrote in part,

Did you hear on Saturday a week ago the play about Joe Hill, the IWW leader on CBC Focus...it was a shattering performance. I couldn't help weeping,

thinking of the sacrificial and inspiring lives of the old working class leaders compared to our present stultification and complacency.²¹

Despite her growing frustration with the party policy and stands, Steeves did not abandon ship. She continued to take an active role in the party until and after the CCF's transformation into the New Democratic Party in 1961. Until her death in 1978, at eighty-seven years of age, she appears to have retained a touch of optimism that democracy and peace would some day triumph.

The slow process of intellectual discovery Steeves underwent throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, deepened her commitment to socialism. It also helped her to discover the working class. Her support of workers, in fact, appears to have taken precedence over the cause which initially attracted her to socialism: women's rights. She did not, however, abandon feminist causes. Though her attention to class inequities overshadowed her attention to sexual discrimination, her legislative contribution, public addresses and work within women's groups suggests that feminism found a significant place in her personal and public quest for a new social order.

Among the more straightforward illustrations of Steeves' commitment to women's emancipation were the many bills and resolutions she forwarded in the Provincial Legislature. She consistently championed such causes as access to birth control, adequate child-care support and facilities, equal pay for equal work and fair employment practices.²² She stressed changes especially beneficial to working-class women but also spoke as a determined feminist insisting upon women's fundamental right to full equality. During one talk to the Vancouver Business and Professional Women's Club she argued that "Women have the same physical, mental, and spiritual desires as men and demand to be freed from the ancient taboos and superstitions being used against them. Among other things they are demanding...to undertake any kind of work according to their ability."²³

Of course, women's ability to undertake "any kind of work" was not simply a matter of social recognition of their skills. Ending her speech with "I doubt whether, logically speaking, the capitalist system can give women the opportunity they desire,"²⁴ she agreed with generations of socialist feminists that the liberation of women necessitated the restructuring of society. Socialism, by redistributing wealth and ensuring fair and equal economic opportunities for both men and women, would ensure economic independence and thus freedom from stifling dependence on men. "No longer would women's actions be governed by economic necessity."²⁵ It was thus crucial that women assist men to solve the social question.

Attitudinal changes naturally went hand in hand with practical steps to sexual equality. Without major ideological shifts, the introduction of socialist measures would hardly free women from second-class citizenship. "Women of today," Steeves posited, "[are] not only wage slaves but in a measure, slaves of men as well...enslaved on all sides by social as well as economic conditions."²⁶ Women, therefore, had to challenge century-long myths and assumptions about the feminine mystique. "It is up to women if they want

their future freedom --that emancipation which they have not--to make up their minds to solve the problem."²⁷

Steeves' mind, of course, had long been made up. From young adulthood to senior citizenship, she individually and collectively challenged sexual stereotypes and discrimination. However, she found individual challenge to sexual injustice considerably easier than cooperative feminism. Although planting both feet in a number of women's organizations, with few exceptions, she failed to develop strong intellectual or emotional ties with the middle-class women these groups housed. In short, she never felt at home in women's organizations.

This hesitant sisterhood stemmed in part from her strong identification with socialists wanting to advance the larger socialist goal. But it was also the intellectually superior woman or, in contemporary terms, the "Queen Bee," who found wholehearted participation in the middle-class women's movement difficult. The comparatively narrow, inexperienced, and maternal views of many of its representatives then, endlessly, at times understandably, frustrated and irritated the intellectually advanced, sophisticated, and relatively undomestic politician.

Having made her own way to the top of the ladder, Steeves was unable to recognize the discrimination which made it difficult for many middle-class women to even climb the first few rungs²⁸ and thus held serious reservations about her own sex. Her commitment to feminist causes was consequently circumscribed by an inability to identify with, or relate to, the majority of women she encountered. In fact, she never really lost her youthful disdain for women who lacked her sophistication and worldly experience. Her loyalty to the CCF and socialist causes was predictably deeper than that to a movement composed of women with whom she felt few intellectual and emotional bonds. The "peacock" of the British Columbia Legislature was, first and foremost, a dynamic and confident spokeswoman for the working class. Her feminist identity, though significant, was pale beside her socialist one.

Socialism also came first for the "guinea hen" of the British Columbia legislature. Like the "peacock," she forged new paths for women, advanced women's rights and assisted feminist campaigns. But her political activities and choices, to an even greater extent perhaps, reflected a preference for socialist fellowship and goals and a flight from a really profound identification with women's groups and women's causes. Grace Winona MacInnis' active political life, like that of Steeves', began during the Depression with the birth of the CCF. While first finding formal expression during the 1930s, it was perhaps inevitable. Born on July 25, 1905, to James Shaver and Lucy Woodsworth, she spent the first twelve years of her life in North Winnipeg, a community which awakened her to the difficult lives of the city's unemployed or underemployed. She also found inspiration in the tireless assistance and support her parents gave to the otherwise-forgotten poor who gathered at her father's Methodist All Peoples' Mission. Yet, throughout her high school, normal school and university years, MacInnis shied away from really active political involvement. She concentrated instead on her primary goal at the time: the successful completion of her studies.

MacInnis believed that if she divided her energies among several activities she would excel in none. If she was to give her all, choices had to be made!

When the eldest Woodsworth child finally did immerse herself in political life in 1932, it was with whole-hearted enthusiasm and single-minded drive. Her attention to the party and cause was undivided. At first she worked for her father in Ottawa, behind-the-scenes. She gradually assumed duties and responsibilities for the entire federal CCF caucus and before long, stepped into front-line activity. According to MacInnis, her marriage to Angus MacInnis, popular MP from Vancouver South, in 1933, accounted for this rapid move into the foreground and onto the speaker's podium.²⁹ Her natural talent, quick mind, and obvious compassion, however, ensured her presence there for many years to come.

MacInnis' first opportunity to speak came during a speaking tour she and her husband, of four days, made to promote the CCF in 1933. Her initiation was very thorough. During an arduous whistle-stop train journey from Ottawa to the Pacific, the MacInnises greeted forty-five different audiences in as many days. She had not originally intended to speak. When pressed to do so by members anxious to hear the daughter of the CCF's founder and "prophet," she was "scared to death and reluctant."³⁰ With Angus' encouragement, however, she ventured forth to afternoon meetings on her own and evening meetings in company with her spouse.

Afternoon gatherings, intended for housewives, were for MacInnis both informative and enjoyable. Her recollections of this first trip, however, dwell more on the mixed evenings. Their exchange of ideas, controversy and debate finally held the greater appeal. This response foreshadowed her consistently stronger identification with mixed rather than predominantly female bodies.

Since Vancouver was to be the MacInnis' headquarters for at least half of the years Angus held federal office, MacInnis wasted little time in familiarizing herself with BC's policy and concerns. It was soon clear that Angus' wife and J.S.'s daughter had, in her own right, much to offer the young CCF. Persistent requests to run for office followed. She did not consent, however, until almost a decade after she first entered the political realm. Finally, in the fall of 1941, she accepted the CCF nomination for Vancouver-Kingsway and shortly thereafter was elected to the British Columbia Legislature, there joining Steeves and another female CCF MLA, Laura Jamieson.

Throughout her three year term which, as with Steeves and Jamieson, ended at the hands of the notorious Liberal-Conservative coalition of 1945, MacInnis concentrated on many of the same issues addressed by her two colleagues. Her ideas on socialist economics, human rights, living conditions, especially housing and nutrition and women's rights joined theirs, echoing through the halls of the Legislature.³¹ Like her older CCF sisters, she also made clear her stand on international issues. There were, however, differences of opinion between MacInnis and Steeves. In fact, their clash over foreign policy brought to the fore different approaches to the process of political and social change, and as suggested earlier, ultimately placed them on opposite wings within the CCF. In turn, their considerable influence within each camp

made them major antagonists in the battle. Needless to say, early intimacy between MacInnis and Steeves was destroyed in the process.³²

MacInnis addressed, in her first speech of January 1942, the issue which was perhaps the greatest, although not the single, source of controversy within the party and between MacInnis and Steeves: Canada's participation in international conflict. She emphasized the building of civilian morale through adequate social services, rather than through military and Imperial affairs. Nonetheless, she did endorse Canada's involvement in World War Two, arguing that Canadians were fighting the war so that democracy might be born.

To those who complained that her stance, like that of the National Council, fell short of the teachings of its leader, she replied:

This is not a black and white world where we can say "this is so or that is right." It is a grey world. We can follow the teachings of those who have gone before us but we can change our own beliefs as we see them, if we are true to our own thinking in 1942.³³

MacInnis' call for flexible thinking illuminated two significant characteristics of her political personality and socialist goals. This was her very pragmatic approach to CCF policy and her profound commitment to the survival and success of the party.

In Steeves' eyes, this pragmatism represented a fatal compromise with liberal thinking. Aware of her opponent's influence on policy, she saw MacInnis' endorsement of flexibility and gradualism as a threat to the realization of principles laid down in the Regina Manifesto. In turn, for MacInnis, Steeves' position reflected an "uncritical acceptance of Marxism."³⁴ While with Steeves, she strongly objected to capitalist economics and values, arguing in 1939, for example, that these were responsible for "this story of human misery, degradation and waste,"³⁵ like her father and husband, she believed that, given the conservative nature of the Canadian worker and general public, gradualism or evolutionary socialism was the only realistic route to the cooperative commonwealth.³⁶ Social-democratic countries such as those in Scandinavia were on the right track. Their pragmatic acceptance of a mixed-economy prepared their citizens for the eventual transformation from capitalism to socialism. Thus, when Steeves editorialized in 1949 that the "right-wing" was discrediting the spirit of J.S. Woodsworth through its abandonment of the basic principles of the Regina Manifesto, which was in her view, "derived from Marxist theories," MacInnis retorted that the fundamental principles of the Manifesto varied considerably from Marxist theory. In particular, she pointed out that the Manifesto's insistence on democratic action directly opposed Marxist theories advocating the overthrow of the existing society. Returning to the response she gave to critics of the CCF's war policy she argued:

He or she who would follow the spirit of J.S. Woodsworth must be ready to break with past traditions and past beliefs, no matter how firmly held, when today's conditions call for new methods and new convictions.³⁷

She concluded with the words her father spoke a decade earlier: "Is not the fear of breaking old beliefs the most insidious kind of belief? Faith is a confident adventuring into the unknown."³⁸

MacInnis' approach to the route to socialism was clearly at odds with that of Steeves. Her strong links with the center and support from moderates within the British Columbia section of the CCF ensured that her position triumphed. Ironically, while their ideas about the process differed significantly, their vision of the goal was remarkably similar. MacInnis' claim that in addition to economic equality "the central core of socialist philosophy lies in the idea that every human being is entitled to certain rights and is expected to assume certain responsibilities"³⁹ squared with Steeves' belief that the socialist ideal means more than economic rights: it also means equality of social rights.⁴⁰ Particularly striking about these two women is the extent to which, in their strategy, in their rallying of forces to their respective side, in their indirect correspondence through the media, in short, in their tenacious battle for control, they were alike. They also shared one other characteristic, an understanding of which is critical to a complete portrait of MacInnis. Both were socialist feminists who resisted feminist sisterhood, preferring the fellowship of mixed, socialist circles. For MacInnis, like Steeves, was finally more comfortable with class liberation and its socialist advocates than women's emancipation and the feminist champions of that cause.

Throughout her career, MacInnis emulated her older CCF sister by personally defying sex-typed conventions and publicly supporting women's rights, within the Legislature, outside it, and within women's groups. Having grown up with parents who, according to MacInnis, did not distinguish between their sons and daughters when assigning household chores, discussing social questions and encouraging career goals, she generally had little time for sexist attitudes and laws. She was taught independence at an early age particularly by her mother who in her words, "taught that there wasn't anything men could do in the world that women couldn't do if they wanted to."⁴¹ Several speeches in the Legislature reflected her strong critique of legal inequities especially those which victimized working-class women. Improved working conditions, equal pay for equal work, equal employment opportunities, and playschool cooperatives, were among her demands.⁴²

MacInnis' personal defiance of sex-ordered norms and her legislative demands reveal clear feminist aspirations. Indeed, writings and speeches which included such statements as "[Under the CCF] women could have just as much opportunity to work as men and receive equal remuneration for equal work,"⁴³ and "only through having full employment can women find equality"⁴⁴ placed her squarely in the socialist feminist tradition. There was, however, a significant imbalance between her socialist and feminist aspirations. Unlike Steeves, she completely tied her feminist goals into her socialist ones, believing that one battle--the socialist one--was sufficient for a class and gender-free society. She never admitted Steeves' sense of superiority over women and claimed respect for women who found it "necessary" to work in autonomous women's groups. But she considered such an approach, "less mature" and preferred working in mixed groups.⁴⁵ "The first thing any man or

woman needs in the line of liberation," MacInnis argued, "is to be liberated from the notion that they are just a man or just a woman...there is something much better than being either and that's being a full human being."⁴⁶

Underlying this insistence that men and women should be regarded as "people" struggling for the same ends was also firm conviction that sexual exploitation was just another manifestation of the larger social problem: capitalist exploitation and the values accompanying it. In an article written for a German socialist publication, she cautioned:

We as socialists know, however, that the differential treatment is not directed at women as such but against the majority of humans, men, women, and children, who could have a higher standard of living if the riches of this land would no longer be invested privately but used for the general welfare of the public. Our objective in the CCF is to convince men and women of the necessity for fundamental social changes.⁴⁷

She clearly blamed capitalism, not patriarchy, for women's oppression. Socialism, then, satisfied both her objectives: equality between the sexes and a classless society. She was unwilling to admit the possibility that a dual battle had to be waged and thus directed almost all her energies within the CCF towards the class battle. Two closely related factors also appear to have reinforced her position.

The first and perhaps most significant explanation was MacInnis' very profound identification with and commitment to the CCF. Success for the party, which to her meant the emergence of a cooperative commonwealth, and, more personally, the realization of her father's dream, could only be achieved through the cooperative efforts of both men and women. To admit discrimination and differential treatment on the basis of sex within the CCF or socialist movement would logically demand a recognition that two struggles existed. For a party already in need of unity and support, such potential division both amongst party members and within members' homes was prohibitively expensive. Moreover, the party could little afford the time, energy and funds a strong commitment to women's rights' issues required.

MacInnis' attitude toward the family offers a final explanation for her apparent unwillingness to recognize socialist vulnerability to sexual stereotyping and discrimination. Her socialism developed as a result of the sense of social responsibility her parents encouraged and lived. Using her own family as a model, she became convinced that the "family was the seedbed of citizenship."⁴⁸ Believing in its crucial role in the search for a better world, she was thus reluctant to critique its sex-ordered and imbalanced power hierarchies. Too, while MacInnis promoted women's ability to succeed in time-honoured male domains, she could not entirely escape prevailing attitudes about women's critical role in the child-rearing process. She agreed that men could and should share in this activity. But she feared the ramifications of major changes to family structures, radical life-style alternatives and institutional child-care. The entry of large numbers of women in the political arena, though theoretically appealing, in practice threatened family stability, child-welfare and responsible citizenship.

MacInnis' claim that the "body politic should ideally consist of a working partnership between men and women,"⁴⁹ while liberating in intent, was, in practice, deficient. She refused to investigate the gaps between the theory and practice of sexual equality within the CCF. She largely rejected autonomous women's groups designed to facilitate women's assumption of equal partnership. She viewed the nuclear family and women's role in the child-rearing process through fairly conventional eyes. Her approach to the woman question did not match her approach to the social one. She made the class struggle a priority. The clarity of her feminist vision subsequently suffered.

In their strategies and attempts to steer the party in a direction each considered to be the most appropriate and in their approach to the "woman question," the "peacock" and the "guinea hen" were clearly two-of-a-kind. Talented and tenacious, they helped engineer important gains for both workers and women. Personal, political and party ambitions, however, worked against a whole-hearted campaign for sexual equality. Socialism came first. Their discovery of workers was considerably more profound than that of women. The emancipated womanhood of their dreams was not quite within reach.



Footnotes

1. Interview with Grace MacInnis, November 18, 1981.
2. *Vancouver Province*, December 12, 1936: 4.
3. *Vancouver Province*, January 29, 1944: 8.
4. MacInnis Interview, *op.cit.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), CCF/NDP Records, Vol. 104, Mrs. D.G. Steeves, 1943-1950. Steeves to Betty Irwin, November 29, 1949.
7. *Ibid.*
8. PABC, Interview with Dorothy Steeves by Marlene Karnouk, April 4, 1975, track 1: 3.
9. Steeves to Irwin, November 29, 1949, *op.cit.*
10. Karnouk Interview, *op.cit.*, p.6.
11. UBC, Special Collections, Steeves Papers, Box 2, Outgoing Correspondence, Steeves to Mrs. Biersteker, March 26, 1919.
12. PAC, CCF/NDP Records, Vol. 144. Research: Biographies Misc., 1944-1953.
13. Steeves to Irwin, November 29, 1949, *op. cit.*
14. Dorothy Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel*, (Vancouver, 1960): 79.
15. Interview with Mildred Farnhi, March 31, 1982.
16. *Vancouver Sun*, February 18, 1935: 1.
17. *Across Canada*, January, 1950. Interview with Harold and Jessie Mendels Winch, May 18, 1982.
18. *The Democrat*, April, 1975; See also Daisy Webster's biographical sketch of Steeves in *Growth of the NDP in BC, 1900-1970*, (Vancouver, n.d.). (UBC SC)
19. Winch Interview, *op.cit.*
20. PAC, MacInnis Papers, Vol. 22, Personal and Political, MacInnis to David Lewis, December 19, 1939.
21. UBC Special Collections, Colin Cameron Papers, Box 1, Incoming Correspondence, Steeves to Cameron, October 9, 1955.
22. See *Victoria Times*, March 17, 1936; *Federationist*, November 17, 1938; *Victoria Times*, March 7, 1943; *Vancouver Sun*, May 12, 1978 and Daisy Webster's, "Women in Politics in British Columbia," UBC Special Collections (unpublished manuscript).
23. *Vancouver Sun*, October 9, 1934: 8.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Victoria Times*, April 25, 1935: 9.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Victoria Times*, March 24, 1936: 7.
28. When asked about discrimination against women in the political arena, the then eighty-five year old Steeves replied: "Oh, not any more, I think. I think those women are looking for discrimination. I've always been of the opinion that I'm as good as any man." Karnouk Interview, *op.cit.*
29. MacInnis Interview, *op.cit.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Vancouver News-Herald*, February 16, 1942: 7.
34. MacInnis Papers, *op.cit.* Vol. 86. Correspondence Re: *CCF News*. MacInnis to the Editor of the *CCF News*, October 1, 1950.
35. *Canadian Forum*, June 1939.

36. See Eleanor Godfrey's biographical sketch of MacInnis in the *New Commonwealth*, September, 1942.
37. MacInnis Papers, *op.cit.* Vol. 86, MacInnis to Editor of *CCF News*, October 1, 1950.
38. *Ibid.*
39. MacInnis Papers, *op.cit.* Vol. 22, British Columbia, 1939-1951.
40. Steeves Papers, *op.cit.*, folder on Cuba.
41. MacInnis Interview, *op.cit.*
42. See: *Vancouver Province*, March 13, 1943: 9; *Vancouver Sun*, September 26, 1944: 7; *Victoria Colonist*, February 13, 1945: 7; Harold Winch remembers MacInnis as the one who was most pronounced on women's rights within the Legislature. Winch Interview, *op.cit.*
43. Grace MacInnis and Charles Woodsworth, *Canada: Through CCF Glasses*. (Vancouver, 1935): 68.
44. *Victoria Colonist*, February 13, 1945.
45. MacInnis Interview, *op.cit.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. PAC, CCF/NDP Records, Vol. 309. Grace MacInnis, "Frauen und Sozialismus in Kanada," *Gleicher*, January 1, 1951. Translation for author by Elvira Ehemann-Burklin, Simon Fraser University, 1981.
48. MacInnis Interview, *op.cit.*
49. *Ibid.*